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VOL. XVIII  
QUARTERLY.

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LONDON :

PUBLISHED BY R. S. CARTWRIGHT,  
8, JOHNSON'S COURT, E.C.

SEPTEMBER, 1882.

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- ✓ THE LATE LORD CAVENDISH.
- ✓ BISHOP OF LONDON.
- ✓ THE LATE GENERAL GARIBALDI.
- ✓ BISHOP OF MANCHESTER.

## W O M E N .

- ✓ BARONESS BULWER-LYTTON.
- ✓ MRS. COWDEN-CLARKE.
- ✓ MRS. GLADSTONE.
- ✓ PRINCESS WILLIAM OF PRUSSIA.
- ✓ THE DUCHESS OF SUTHERLAND.
- ✓ DUCHESS OF KENT.



# GRACE RENDLESHAM'S WHIM

BY THE AUTHOR OF "CRUELLY WRONGED," "THE HEIR OF GRAYRIGG," ETC.

## CHAPTER I.



drop in the ocean my governor allows me. You are certainly better off, for yours comes down uncommonly handsome, and you are the eldest son. For my part, I can't see what younger sons are born for, unless it is to make trade for the Jews"—and the Honourable George Middleton, third son of the Earl of Geldart, took his cigar out of his mouth, and looked at it with a melancholy air, which seemed out of place on his handsome, good-tempered countenance.

"Well, you have my most sincere wishes for your success; only, don't blame me for it if she makes a fool of *you*," his friend replied, as he stretched out his feet towards the fire, thrust his hands into his pockets, and gazed thoughtfully into the glowing embers.

A singularly handsome man—the best-looking fellow in the —th, and it was a noted regiment for fine men. He had even on first entering earned for himself the nickname of "Beauty;" and though now a captain, and looked up to with the greatest respect and awe by his brother-officers, the name had still stuck to him; and "Beauty Talbot" he was, and ever would be, in the regiment. Tall, and straight-limbed, with raven hair and large, expressive grey eyes—eyes that would alternately glow with excitement or melt into tenderness—a finely-formed nose and resolute mouth, shaded by the dark, drooping moustache, he bore away the palm for good looks from all his fellows; and each and all were forced to retire from the field when he appeared. Women adored him for his handsome face and chivalrous manner. Eyes that flashed in haughty surprise before the admiration of other men drooped at his glance; while smiling lips

**N**O; I'll be hanged if I do!" The speaker brought down his hand upon the table with a force which made the glasses and decanters ring again.

"Well, don't put yourself out of temper about it, old boy; only you are always saying you must marry a grandee, and here's the very thing. She has no end of money, and would marry you to-morrow if you asked her."

"That's just it. She's a regular flirt, they say; but I'll never marry a girl who throws herself at every fellow's head as this one has the credit of doing—no, not if she had money enough to buy up every estate in England."

"Well, do as you like; only, if *you* are not going in for her, why, I think *I* may as well. It's deuced hard work keeping up appearances upon nothing a year but one's pay, and the miserable

greeted his approach, and beauty blushed before the unspoken homage of his eyes.

No greater contrast either in looks or disposition could possibly have been found than that between Lionel Talbot and his chosen friend and companion, George Middleton. The latter, a tall, broad-shouldered, muscular young giant, with his fair, Saxon beauty, merry blue eyes, and lazy temperament, seemed insensible to care or trouble. Nothing ever appeared to put him out, nobody ever saw his temper ruffled, or his blue eyes flash in anger. A chance word which would make Captain Talbot's blood boil, and call forth a cutting rejoinder, whose withering sarcasm struck like a sharp knife upon the unthinking speaker, only evoked a smile and shrug of the broad shoulders from his friend, who would lay his hand upon Lionel's shoulder with a lazy, "Never mind, Li ; don't be too hard upon him : he knows he's an ass without you taking the trouble to tell him so."

Lionel Talbot's one fault was pride. He was proud of his family, of his long line of ancestors, of his name, which had never been sullied by disgrace or dishonour; and with that pride he inherited all the fastidious dislike to anything approaching vulgarity, and the innate good-breeding which distinguishes blue blood in every noble race. Born of wealthy parents who idolised him, caressed and made much of by society, and flattered by its queens, what wonder that this fault of his should have grown and increased with every year of his life, and that he should deeply resent his father's fixed desire that he should marry an heiress?

"I tell you, Lionel," old General Talbot would say decisively, "though I am pretty well off, I'm not going to have you boys hampering yourselves with penniless wives. You will marry money, and add to the estate, or I'll leave every penny away from you." And thus it was that when the invitation came from George Middleton's uncle, for himself and his friend to spend Christmas at Pentallwn Castle, in North Wales, to meet (so the letter said) "the greatest heiress in all England," Captain Talbot gave vent to the foregoing remarks. He knew that now the dearest wish of his father's heart might be fulfilled—that he might "go in and win" the beautiful heiress of Llandylian if he chose. Ay, if he chose; but Lionel did not choose. He resolved to take his own way with regard to his future, and the letter from his father which urged him to go and try his luck had been contemptuously tossed into the fire.

"Well, Li, shall we go? Stay, I'll read you the letter once more :—

DEAR GEORGE.—Glad to hear you and your friend will favour us with your company; and to show you how I appreciate the honour, I have got your aunt to invite Miss Rendlesham here. She is beautiful as an angel, and as rich as Croesus. Twenty thousand a year, and the show place of the county! Here is a chance for you both; but they say she is an awful flirt, and throws fellows over by the dozens, so take care of yourselves, for I cannot——"

"There, that will do, George, for Heaven's sake. I'm sick of the sound of that girl's name. She may keep her thousands for all I care, and my father can cut me off with a shilling if he likes, I won't be beholden to my wife for the house I live in, and the food I eat. No, I'll be hanged if I will ! as I said before."

"Well, and as I said before, don't put yourself out about it ; it's not really worth the trouble," resumed the Honourable George, in his lazy tones. "But I suppose you'll go all the same?"

"Certainly, we have accepted, you know ; and it would be deuced hard to have to spend one's Christmas in this dull hole, with half the fellows away."

George Middleton laughed. "Half the fellows resolves itself into little Rosamond Hatherleigh, doesn't it, Li?"

Lionel started and coloured. "Don't be an ass, George. You know very well she is going to marry Blair. Whatever she can see in that cad passes my power of discernment."

"I always thought you were a little touched in that quarter," Mr. Middleton said, throwing away the end of his cigar, and sauntering lazily to the other end of the room for another box.

Lionel lifted his glass of claret to his lips, and did not answer ; but the hand which held the glass shook so that half of the contents went down his sleeve. "Confound these glasses ! I can't think why they don't make them a sensible shape, one can never get hold of them," he said crossly.

"Eh ? what ? want another glass ? Help yourself, then, my dear boy, there's plenty more on the sideboard. In these plaguey close quarters at Aldershot one is always losing something or other. Now I could have declared I put that box of Manillas on here last night, and now, lo and behold, they're gone !" and George Middleton came back to the table, a look of perplexity on his good-humoured face.

"What are these ?" asked Lionel Talbot, pointing to a box close to his elbow.

Mr. Middleton broke into a loud guffaw. "You may well call me an ass. By Jove ! to think I never saw it all this time ! It must

be the thought of the heiress. I say, I wonder if she is really as beautiful as they report," musingly.

"I should hardly think so. Money makes the man, you know, and most likely her lands and rent-roll cover a multitude of imperfections in this wonderful creature. However," rising and stretching himself, "I think I'll turn in now, I've got to attend that beastly parade at no one knows what time in the morning. Good night, old boy," and Captain Talbot, with a careless nod, betook himself off to his own quarters.

"I can't make Lionel out," mused George Middleton, as he once more settled himself down in his easy-chair before the fire. "Last week he was so full of going to Pentallwn; and now since that letter came, he seems to want to back out of it. Good Heavens! the chances that fellow has had and thrown away! chances that I should have been only too thankful for, by Jove! There was Lady Alice Minterby, fine girl, in spite of her red hair, heaps of money—wouldn't have anything to say to her, and they say she didn't get over it for a long time. Then there was Jessie Ratherby, *sle* would have had him, if he had asked her, and been grateful into the bargain; but no; he sneered off there directly people thought he was going to propose. Afterwards there was that affair with Miss Wrigleson; and I heard she had joined the Church of Rome and gone into a nunnery. By Jingo! the things that fellow will have to answer for one of these days! Well, I'm glad I'm not such a lady-killer. I couldn't take the trouble, that's one thing. It's awful hard work having to propose. I shall get my lady-love to do it in odr case—give her a hint beforehand. I think I'll write to the governor and tell him I'm going in for the heiress. Perhaps he'll come down handsome by way of Christmas-box, for I'm deuced hard-up and dread the sight of letters, they are always from duns. Not a bad idea; I'll write now, whilst I am in the humour. Here goes." He drew writing materials before him, and began in his large, sprawling hand, so like himself:

"DEAR DAD.—Uncle Armitage has asked Lionel Talbot and self down there for Christmas, so we are off next week. There is an heiress—a Miss Rendlesham (twenty thousand a-year and a fine estate) going to be there. I mean to make up to her, and have no doubt she will quickly succumb to my powers of fascination. Wish me luck, and accept my sincere regret that I can't join the family party at Christmas. Lionel's people are still in Madeira, so he would have had to spend the festive season here, unless you would have taken pity on him. Love to the *mater*.—Your affectionate son,  
G. MIDDLETON."

The Honourable George was not far out in his surmises that his father would be gratified at his projected scheme. By return of post came a cheque for a hundred pounds, and a letter expressive of the Earl's approval.

"I do, indeed, wish you luck, my boy," the letter ran, "and trust you will not fail in this, as in other schemes, through your too great fear of exerting yourself. I suppose you are 'hard up,' as usual, though you do not mention the fact in your letter, so enclose you a Christmas-box, with love and good wishes from the family.—Your affectionate father,  
GELDAK."

\* \* \* \* \*

The afternoon sun was shining down with last fond beams upon the wintry earth—upon the bare trees in the park, whose leafless branches looked gaunt and desolate without their garb of green—upon the distant purple mountains with their snowy summits, tinted now with a sweet pale rose-colour, and upon the many towers and turrets of Pentallwn Castle, whose windows sparkled like diamonds beneath his beams. The frosty air was clear and still; no sound was heard but the rushing of the brook over the stones, as it dashed along in its course towards the distant river, or at intervals the cawing of the rooks from their nests in the bare branches of the trees overhead.

Down a small path leading from the Castle grounds came a girl, followed by a small Scotch terrier, who scampered hither and thither in evident enjoyment of the keen air and bright sunshine—ever and anon stopping in front of his mistress, and regarding her with excited eyes, as who shculd say, "Does not this lovely day make your heart light and your spirits gay, mistress mine? Would that I could give utterance to the delight which fills my little mind at the beauties around me!" and the girl, looking down as if in answer to the appealing eyes, said softly—

"Yes, Dandie, dear litt'e dog, we do enjoy a scamper together, don't we? Come along!" and setting off at a quick run, girl and dog darted down the drive, till the rosy colour came into the former's beautiful childish face, and her large blue eyes sparkled like diamonds.

Yes, Grace Rendlesham was indeed a beauty—it did not need a second glance to assure one of that. Just now, with her bright gold hair tumbled with her run, the soft rose-pink complexion heightened, and the pretty lips parted in a smile, disclosing two rows of pearly teeth, she was Venus herself. Rather above the middle height, with slim, graceful figure, and head held erect, small hands and feet, and a graceful carriage, what more can I say of the lovely

heiress who had been gifted with everything Nature could supply and fortune bestow, and yet remained as unspoiled and innocent a maiden as could possibly be seen? Self-willed she certainly was, but it was a sweet and playful wilfulness which never stepped beyond the bounds of good breeding and good temper.

Left an orphan at an early age, and mistress of a large property, she stood in much danger of being thoroughly spoiled by adulation and flattery; but, thanks to the gentle teaching of a conscientious governess, Grace Rendlesham had come out unscathed from the ordeal of being a petted heiress thrown so early upon the responsibilities and enticements of her exalted position; and Mrs. Grey, who still remained as chaperone and companion to her beloved pupil, declared there was not a sweeter, more lovable character upon the earth.

"We will run down as far as the lodge, Dandie, and see Mrs. Jones's baby. I've got some goodies for it—sponge cakes, Dandie!" holding up a small bag, at sight of which Dandie twirled himself round and round in expectant delight. "No, not for you, greedy little dog! You wouldn't, surely, rob the poor baby? Fie, Dandie!" Dandie hung his head and wagged his tail at the gentle reproof; then, suddenly catching sight of an imaginary rabbit among the brushwood, he scampered off, and was lost to sight.

"Halloa, Grace! Whither away, fair maid?" Miss Rendlesham turned quickly round at the sound of the voice, calling to her in loud masculine tones from among the trees which bordered one side of the drive. In another moment a tall form, clad in shooting costume, with a gun over one shoulder, came sauntering up—a fair, curly-headed youth, almost a boy in years, but with a form as lithe and straight as an arrow.

"What do you want with me, Joe?" the girl replied, amusedly regarding the advancing sportsman. "Are you anxious to show your trophies, or to get me to deplore with you the unwillingness of everything to come within range of your unerring shot?"

"Don't chaff, Grace, it doesn't suit your style of beauty at all. I wanted to see you to give you a hint about George and that fellow he is bringing with him to-morrow. They are both of them going in for you, and Lionel is no end killing—quite a lady's man. You'll be dead spoons on him in a week!"

"Joe, I shall *not!* How dare you say so?"

"Because it's the truth. I've heard Lucy Dunbar talk of Captain Talbot, and she said he was an awful flirt, broke every girl's heart he came across. I've seen him once myself—awfully good-looking fellow—George swears by him."

"He and your cousin have been friends for a long time, haven't they?" Miss Rendlesham spoke thoughtfully, as she and Joe Armitage walked along side by side, followed at a respectful distance by Dandie, to whom a gun was an object of mortal dread.

"Yes, ever since they joined the —th. George has wanted him to come over and over again; but somehow he always either couldn't or wouldn't."

"I haven't seen your cousin George since I was quite a little thing. He doesn't remember me either, Minna says," rather dubiously.

"No; because you've always kept yourself locked up in your fortress, like an enchanted princess. But I say, Grace, are you going to turn the tables on the hero?" looking down quizzically at the fair face under the plumed hat.

"I don't know what I shall do yet" Miss Rendlesham replied loftily. "It would be fun, though, to turn the tables on this lady-killer, and rout him with complete slaughter," and a silvery laugh rang out upon the still wintry air. "I'm going in here, Joe," she added; "you needn't wait. No doubt I shall catch you up. You never hurry yourself, I notice." They had reached the park gates, and with a nod and smile Grace disappeared into the pretty ivy-covered lodge, Dandie creeping in slyly after her.

Mr. Armitage sauntered back by the way they had come, whistling softly to himself. He and Grace Rendlesham had been like brother and sister ever since the day six years before, when he rescued Dandie from a watery grave in the lake, that daring little animal having gone in after a huge stone, which in diving after, had struck him on the head, and had it not been for the timely aid of Master Joe, would have caused his destruction. Mr. Armitage would not have hesitated to tell you that he liked Grace far better than his own stately sister, who never laughed at his pranks as the heiress did, nor winked at his extravagance and lazy habits. They were a great contrast, this brother and sister, but then there was five years' difference between them, Minna being five-and-twenty, Joe only twenty. He would be the baronet some day, for there were but himself and his sister; and Sir John Armitage looked with no little fatherly

pride upon his handsome, stalwart son.

"If only the boy marries Grace Rendlesham we shall have two of the finest estates in England joined in one," he would remark, with a chuckle, to his wife.

"My dear John, he is much too young to think of marrying yet!" Lady Armitage would reply contemptuously; "besides, Grace and he are far too much like brother and sister ever to be anything more."

"Well, we shall see, Mary, we shall see. I really think, though, it was a pity we asked that young Talbot down here with George; he may take it into his head to propose to her."

"Now, John," his wife would say, authoritatively, "don't interfere with matchmaking—you will never help matters if you do. Let things take their course. I am very fond of Grace, and should be delighted to welcome her as my daughter, but I don't believe for one moment I ever shall."

"We shall see, Mary, we shall see!" the old gentleman said again. "Joe's a fine fellow—a very fine fellow indeed."

\* \* \* \*

"Now, then, Dandie, we must make haste home, or we shan't get any tea," said Miss Rendlesham, when, with a parting nod and smile to the baby, whom his proud mother brought out to look after the young lady, she once more hurried along the drive towards the house. "No signs of Joe; he might have waited, though I told him not. I shall just pay him off for that," she murmured, peering right and left in search of the tall, grey-clad form. "Ah, a letter of his! What fun! I shall read it, and then tease him about it after."

Picking up the envelope, which lay so tantalisingly on the ground just at her feet, she looked at the address, and then, with a low laugh of mischief, coolly took out the letter and proceeded to make herself mistress of its contents.

"DEAR JOE,"—it began—"We shall be down on Thursday by the 6.50 train, just in time for dinner. I am sure it was ~~a~~ <sup>awfully</sup> good of Uncle John to give me such a chance of bettering myself as he has done, by asking Miss Rendlesham to the Castle—I must put on my most fascinating airs and graces for the occasion. As to Lionel, I don't know what has come over him; he says somebody told him Miss R. was a regular flirt—fast and purse-proud into the bargain, so he declares he will have nothing to do with her—*his* wife must be a gentle maid of high degree, her soul all innocence, her life one of unselfish goodness, &c. Did you ever hear such rubbish? I've bet him a pony he will propose to the heiress in a week, and he says I shall; so we will make you umpire, old boy, and don't enter the lists unless you wish to be the death of your affectionate coz., G. MIDDLETON."

"Detestable young man! How I hate him!" Miss Rendlesham's face was crimson with anger, her blue eyes flashing brilliantly, and she stamped her little foot upon the ground in impotent wrath. "A flirt and purse-proud! Surely, a noble specimen of womanhood! This comes of picking up and reading private correspondence. So they have been making vulgar bets about me, have they? But I will be even with them. Yes, Lionel Talbot, you shall rue the day you said you would have nothing to do with me, for, with all my frivolity, fast behaviour, worldliness, and love of my money, I will—yes, unmaidenly, and against my whole nature as it is—I'll make you love me; and when you come and beg at my feet for a return of that love, then—I shall be revenged!"

She drew her slight form up to its full height, and curled her pretty mouth in angry scorn, then, folding the letter carefully together, put it again into its envelope and continued her walk. "I shall not tell Joe I have found it," she mused. "That would never do; and, besides," her face flushed, "I shouldn't like him to know I had read that about myself. That was what he meant, I suppose, when he said they were 'going in' for me. *Wretches!*"

Up through the little gate leading into the grounds the girl pursued her way. Before her rose the Castle, its many windows bathed in the glory of the setting sun, while its ancient grey towers rose solemn and majestic against the dark-blue sky. Half-way up the terrace steps Miss Rendlesham paused, then, instead of proceeding indoors, betook herself to a little side-walk, where a seat had been placed, no doubt for the convenience of lovers, for it was a snug retreat, and sheltered from all intruders by a screen of thick laurels. Here they could sit and forget the lapse of time, buried in an elysium of happiness and love.

The girl threw herself down upon the bench, and gave herself up to all-absorbing and busy thought. Over and over in her mind she turned the matter occupying her attention, and Dandie had twice tried to distract her attention without response or caress. "I have it!" she exclaimed at last, springing to her feet. "I must go at once and put it in practice. I never had such fun in my life! Frivolous and purse-proud, ay, and fast and vulgar!" She broke into a peal of merry laughter as she turned once more towards the house; and Dandie joined in, with sundry small yelps, which lasted till they arrived indoors.

"Where is Miss Armitage?" Grace inquired of the grey-haired butler whom she

met crossing the hall with a tray of cups and saucers.

"In the library, with my lady, miss. I am just taking tea in there now," the old man replied.

"Good, the very thing!" Miss Rendlesham said to herself, as she proceeded on her way.

A cosy, comfortable-looking room was that which she entered, with its massive oak furniture, dark crimson curtains, luxurious easy-chairs, and rows of inviting-looking literature upon the book-shelves. Two ladies were seated before the fire, one middle-aged and still handsome, with a haughty patrician face and piercing grey eyes. A large mob cap, dauntly trimmed with old point and pale lavender ribbon, rested upon the raven hair, as yet untouched by the snowy hand of Time. The other occupant of the room was a girl dark as a gipsy, lovely as a houri. Large velvety eyes, over which the heavily-fringed lids drooped like a veil to hide their beauty, and the finely arched eyebrows gave to the pale face a haughty expression when in repose; but animated or angry, Minna Armitage was superb; and when a smile of pleasure parted the red lips, then did her friends wonder at the sweet expression it gave to the faultless countenance. Neither tall nor short, with a graceful figure and pretty hands and feet, Minna Armitage was universally acknowledged beautiful, and made a pleasing contrast to her fair, golden-haired friend, the heiress of Llandyfan.

Both ladies looked up as Grace entered the library, and both smiled a welcome. "What a long time you have been out, Grace! I thought you were lost, and meant to have gone to meet you, but Mr. Bradley came and kept us talking such a time," Minna said, folding up her crewel work and preparing to dispense the tea.

"I suppose this is the last cosy afternoon we shall have," Miss Rendlesham remarked somewhat ruefully, as she threw herself into the depths of a large easy-chair, and took the cup Minna had handed to her.

"Yes; the Durnford girls and Miss Porter come to-morrow in time for dinner, and George and his friend," Lady Armitage said, looking up from her knitting, and speaking in soft, languid tones.

"How I do hate those Durnfords! Lydia is so gushing, and treats that poor little companion of theirs abominably," Minna said vehemently.

"She always makes such a deal of me, on account of my money; and I know if I happened to be poor, she would throw me over directly," Grace said, laughing.

"Do you know Captain Talbot, Lady Armitage?" she continued abruptly, as she rose from her chair and went to the table for some bread and butter. She spoke nonchalantly, but there was an undercurrent of eagerness beneath her outward indifference which did not escape her ladyship's quick ears.

"No; he has never been ~~been~~ here yet, though we have repeatedly asked him; but then George has never been able to come either lately, his father has been ailing for some time past."

"Well, I heard something about Captain Talbot which made me very angry. If I had known it before I should have asked you to let me leave before he came, but as it is, I want you to give me your advice and help in a plan I have in my head. Now listen."

## CHAPTER II.

**N**OW mind, Joe, you are not to make a single remark on anything I do or say, and you are not to breathe a word of anything I have told you--you understand?"

"Perfectly. I think it's an awful joke if you can only keep it up."

"You may trust me." Miss Rendlesham's blue eyes took an angry gleam, as she drew in her reins a little tighter, and gave her horse a light touch with the whip, causing him to rear in protest. She and Mr. Armitage were riding along the country lanes side by side, a handsome couple, with their happy, laughing faces bright with the flush of exercise. They had been far away over the moors all the afternoon, and Grace had been expounding her schemes of the day before to her astonished cavalier, as they walked their horses homewards.

"And don't forget, Joe, you are to follow all my doings, and remember your part; don't overdo it; and, please, don't make me laugh."

"I'll do my best, but oh, lor!" He threw back his head and laughed long and heartily, till Miss Rendlesham, growing impatient of his merriment, brought him to order with a smart cut of her little jewelled riding whip.

"If you are going to begin to be silly, Joe, I wish I hadn't let you into the secret, only unfortunately I can't do without you," sighing.

"No, of course you can't, and I'll be awfully good. You'll promise in return to keep me out of the clutches of the Durn-

ford girls, won't you? I shall die if you don't."

"Very well," she laughed at his horrified face. "Let us have one more canter through the park, shall we?"

Two hours later Miss Rendlesham descended to the drawing-room dressed for dinner—but so changed! Her fair wavy hair had been curled and fizzed till it stood out all over her head like a yellow mop. Dark eyebrows, well arched, and eyelashes to match, made the blue eyes look bold and unfeeling; while the plentifully rouged cheeks gave an unnatural brilliancy to her face. Her gown of yellow satin, quaint in make and covered with lace, was bordered with peacock's feathers; she carried a fan of the same in her hand; and her neck, arms, and hands literally blazed with diamonds. She had a diamond aigrette in her frizzily locks, and jewels of the same dazzling lustre flashed on every finger.

A mocking smile curled her lip as she surveyed her bright reflection in the large mirror before leaving her room, while the astonished maid stood aghast at this new freak of her young mistress. "Yes, I think that will do, Fletcher. Ugh! you horrid fright!" to herself in the glass.

All the guests were assembled in the drawing-room when the heiress made her appearance—as, indeed, she intended they should. Sir John Armitage, a regular specimen of the good, old-fashioned country gentleman, bluff and good-natured from the top of his shining bald head to the ends of his gouty old toes, came forward at once in his rôle of host, and giving Miss Rendlesham his arm, while his eyes twinkled again with fun, and the rest of the company looked on in open-mouthed amazement, he led her up to two gentlemen, who since her entrance had been gazing at her in comical perplexity.

"My dear, allow me to introduce my nephew George and his friend Captain Talbot of the—th, Miss Rendlesham."

Grace raised her large blue eyes, and favoured the new-comers with a cool stare. "Glad to make your acquaintance," she said, in loud, drawling tones, and with a slight lisp. "Where is Joe?"—turning to Sir John, who was regarding her amusedly. "I want my dinner"—then looking again at Captain Talbot, she added, "I dare say you are beginning to feel rather peckish too, after your journey?"

The fastidious "beauty" of the —th could scarcely conceal his disgust. "I am not hungry," he replied coldly.

"Oh, nonsense! I'm sure you are, only you don't like to say so. You needn't be

so particular, as the man said to his friend whom he was going to throw into the sea before he was dead! Ha! ha!"

Captain Talbot writhed again. Grace's quick ear had caught the smothered sounds of mirth immediately behind her—she turned quickly round to encounter poor Joe in the agonies of suppressed laughter.

"Now then," giving him a sounding slap with her fan, "what are you laughing at, you idiot? Go and see if dinner is ready."

Mr. Armitage moved away, glad enough to hide his mirth in a retired corner.

"I shall go down to dinner with you," pursued Miss Rendlesham, linking her arm within that of George Middleton, who looked as if he wished the earth would open and swallow him up, "because you look greedy, and I always like to enjoy my dinner without being talked to. I dare say you feel the same. He"—pointing with her fan at Lionel—"looks cross."

Looks were not far wrong in this case, for could Captain Talbot have summoned the seven-leagued boots to his aid, that moment would have seen miles between him and this hateful young woman.

"Captain Talbot, will you take down Miss Durnford?" Lady Armitage said, coming up at this moment. "I am sorry you haven't secured Miss Rendlesham, she is so clever and amusing."

"She is, by Jove!" Lionel muttered to himself with a sneer, as he followed in the wake of his hostess towards the two girls, who, with fair hair exactly alike, blue eyes, red cheeks, and pink dresses ditto, awaited his coming with eager expectation.

"Letitia, this is a new friend of ours, Captain Talbot, Miss Durnford"—they exchanged bows. "You must make yourself very agreeable to him, my dear, as he is a stranger."

"I will try, but I am such a dreadfully shy little person; you must really not expect too much," Miss Durnford said gushingly, as she laid her hand lightly on her companion's arm. "My sister Dora always does all the talking, and I stay in the background and listen. What a very strange dress Miss Rendlesham has on! Is it æsthetic?" craning her neck to look at Grace over the shoulders of the couple in front, as they moved away towards the dining-room.

"I don't know; I suppose it is," Captain Talbot replied politely.

"Do you ever meet any of those people now in London? I do so long to see a real live Mr. Postlethwaite!" Miss Durnford continued, looking up languishingly at Lionel, as he seated himself next her at the dinner-table.

"Well, yes, I certainly *have met* some of the tribe," he replied, smiling. "One girl, I remember, wore a loose calico dress and sandals on her bare feet——"

"Oh, dear! how shockingly improper! Fie, Captain Talbot!" putting up her hands and trying to look shocked.

"What was improper, did you say?" The loud tones came across the table, making every one stop talking, as Miss Rendlesham paused in her intent contemplation of her plate of soup to ask the question. If, however, she had expected to embarrass or annoy Captain Talbot she was foiled.

"I was telling Miss Durnford of a girl I met in London who appeared in a most outrageous dress. She went in for *aestheticism*, and appeared in bare feet and sandals," he said, making his answer a general one, for the benefit of the company.

"Oh!" replied Miss Rendlesham shortly, with a slight shrug of her shoulders.

Poor George Middleton's face was a study. All through that (to him) unlucky dinner Grace alternately ogled, flattered, and worried him with questions, till by the time the ladies left the dining-room he had made up his mind to go back by the next train to Aldershot.

The sweet strains of a rich soprano voice singing, "Should he upbraid" reached the ears of the gentlemen when, about half an hour later, they entered the drawing-room. Lionel Talbot, to whom music was quite a passion, quickly made his way to the piano, at which Miss Rendlesham was seated. She no sooner caught sight of him, however, than, abruptly ceasing her song, she sprang from the music-stool, declaring that she was hoarse; she could not sing another note to save her life. No persuasions would induce her to return to the piano. "I won't, then; that's flat!" she said at last, when pressed by Joe in a tender, sentimental voice, to "sing just one more for him." "I'm going for a walk on the terrace; come along, Joe," she said, rising from the low chair into which she had thrown herself, and catching up a large fleecy shawl from the sofa. "We'll go and smoke."

Obedient Joe followed her from the room, whilst Sir John laughed, and Lady Armitage looked half vexed. "Dear girl! she has such funny ways!" she said, looking round apologetically.

"Miss Rendlesham is peculiar, certainly," Letitia Durnford said sweetly to Captain Talbot, whom by a skilful manoeuvre she had managed once more to chain to her side. "She always was a strange girl; so dreadfully fast, and thinking that her

money allows her to do anything she likes. It must be dreadful to live with her!"—shuddering.

"It must, indeed," Lionel answered fervently.

"Don't you admire her?" looking curiously up at him with her pale blue eyes.

"Admire her? My dear Miss Durnford, you must be joking. Admire that painted, frizzed, dressed-up——"

"Jezebel, you may as well finish!" The loud tones close to his ear startled the Captain not a little: he coloured all over his brown face.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Rendlesham, but listeners, you know——" trying to speak coolly.

"Oh, yes, I know; but you needn't have spoken *quite* so loud, all the same, both of you. It is snowing, Lady Armitage, we had to come in," turning away, and seating herself on the sofa by her hostess.

Letitia Durnford felt rather uncomfortable; she did not know how much Grace had heard, and she could not afford to quarrel with the heiress just yet. Captain Talbot, true gentleman as he was, would have given all he possessed to unsay his words, but it was no use thinking of it, and perhaps his outspoken opinion might induce this strange girl to be more careful in her behaviour for the future.

"Miss Porter, will you play something?" Lionel started. The voice speaking with gentle, kindly courtesy could never be the same one whose loud, drawling tones grated so harshly on his ear.

"Certainly, Miss Rendlesham, with pleasure." The pale, melancholy visage of the poor little duenna, whom the Durnford girls forced to accompany them wherever they went, lighted up as the heiress spoke, her cheeks flushing with pleasure.

"Miss Rendlesham always makes such an absurd fuss about Miss Porter," Letitia said crossly. "It is only to bring her out, and then laugh at her behind her back afterwards."

But Captain Talbot did not answer. He rose abruptly, and crossing over to the piano, sat down by it, to the no small trepidation of poor little Miss Porter, who had never in her recollection had so handsome and courteous an audience before. Her playing was generally looked upon as a sort of screen for conversation, nobody ever taking the trouble to listen to or thank Miss Durnford's paid companion. Therefore, when, at the conclusion of her brilliant sonata, Captain Talbot bent towards her and thanked her with tender and courteous

*embressement* for the treat she had given him, begging her to play something else, the poor neglected little creature literally beamed with joy and gratification, and played as she had never played before. Truth to tell, Lionel was glad enough of the excuse to get away from Letitia's wearying conversation, and the open-eyed, wondering stare of the dreadful heiress.

"Well, did I succeed?" Miss Rendlesham asked, going into Minna's room before retiring for the night. "Did I look fast, and frivolous, and purse-proud?"

Miss Armitage laughed, then sighed. "Gracie darling! I cannot bear to see you so!" she whispered, as she threw her arms round her friend's neck and kissed her; "and I am sure he is nice."

"If he be not nice to me,  
What care I how nice he be?"

sang Miss Rendlesham, as she left the room.

"Oh, you awful creature!" she said, looking at the reflection of her towled head and carmine cheeks in her looking-glass. "However could any one make such a guy of oneself! But then I am resolved to pay him out. I will tease and plague him till he shall wish he had never set foot within the doors. Admire me!"—she looked at herself and burst into a peal of merry laughter. "How could any one in their senses admire such a fright? I nearly laughed outright when he said it. He is really very handsome, though"—and she sighed.

### CHAPTER III.

UICKLY and merrily the days wore on. It wanted now only a week to Christmas, and the coming festive season was to be kept at Pentallwn with all the gaiety and good old customs of olden times. Riding, driving, hunting, sleighing, and skating had been the order of the day, in all of which Miss Rendlesham showed forth first and foremost, clad in the most startling of costumes that ingenuity could suggest, or fashion devise. One day she would appear on the lake in a skating costume of bright crimson plush trimmed with minever—a crimson Tam o' Shanter cap with a diamond aigrette perched on her golden locks. Another time she had donned a pelisse of white fur, with cap and muff to match, looking, Joe told her, like a Polar bear. No vagary in dress or manner was omitted by her. In the hunting-field she appeared mounted on the most spirited mare the Pentallwn stables contained, her short

riding habit disclosing the pretty little boots, armed with murderous-looking spurs which ever and anon (when Lionel Talbot approached her) she dug with ferocious force into her horse's flanks, making it rear and plunge in frenzied remonstrance.

It would be impossible to describe the feelings of Captain Talbot during those days. He could not have told them himself; for while he affected to dislike and despise the frivolous, worldly girl, who stopped at nothing, said what she liked, and did as her fancy dictated, yet he found it almost impossible to avoid her, and each day saw him at her side, an unwilling captive. More than once, when her behaviour had been wilder than usual, her words more cutting, and her dress more outrageous, he had resolved to make some excuse for quitting the vicinity of so dangerous and disagreeable a person, and betake himself once more to his lonely quarters at Aldershot; but even as he made the resolve, a glance from the blue eyes or a sweet smile from the red lips of the heiress would banish his resolve, and he would once more become a moth basking in the sunshine of her presence.

"It is strange," he would mutter to himself, as he looked upon the graceful figure, over-laden with laces and jewels, upon the painted face and fuzzy golden head—"strange that after all I have said, this girl should exercise such an influence over me that I feel as if I would do more to win one smile or glance of approval from her than from the most beautiful woman on earth—that I would almost sell my soul for the privilege of kissing those sweet lips! Pshaw! What a fool I am, to be sure! As if I could ever care for that bedecked, painted piece of gilded vulgarity! And yet—" Captain Talbot ended his musings with a long-drawn sigh as he sauntered off to help Miss Rendlesham on with her skates.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Only three days to Christmas, Joe, what are you going to give me for a Christmas-box?" Miss Rendlesham stood at the dining-room window watching the fast-falling snow-flakes. She spoke in her usual tones, for only Joe was present, the rest having braved the weather and gone for a walk.

"I don't know," came in sleepy tones from the depths of the arm-chair where Mr. Armitage had ensconced himself for a morning nap. "Would you like a new dress, something in bright red and yellow, like you have been treating us to lately? Good gracious, you have made a fright of yourself, Grace!"

"Thank you," returned Grace, politely.  
"No, but really, you know, it is hard for me to hear you run down by the fellows. Dick Reynolds said he never saw any one gone off so in his life; wouldn't have known you. And as to George and Lionel, I'm expecting to hear them say every day they will go, you tease them so."

"And serve them right. Look here, Joe"—she left the window, and went and stood on the rug in front of him—"I made up my mind when those two came that I would make their visit as unpleasant as I could. I flatter myself I have succeeded. Captain Talbot has at last found out that every woman he meets is not quite so ready to jump at him as he thought. I shock his fastidiousness by my vulgarity, his principles by my open contempt for anything just and right, and his pride because I keep dinging into his ears that I have more money than he can ever hope to have all the days of his life! Oh, Joe, haven't I been *odious* to him?" Miss Rendlesham broke off with a laugh that was half-hysterical.

"Yes, I must say I think you have been too hard on him. He is out and out a good fellow, and I will say this for him: that I have never heard him make one unkind or rude remark about you, even when you have treated him worst." Joe spoke vehemently, his fair face flushing in his defence of his friend.

"Going over to the enemy, Joe? *Et tu, Brute?* I didn't think it of you!" and with a scornful toss of her golden head Miss Rendlesham walked away towards the window.

Mr. Armitage followed her. "Now, Grace, don't be so cross; I've not gone over to the enemy (as you call it) at all. I only said, and I repeat it, you are too hard on him. Come, now, kiss and be friends, there's a good girl; that pretty little mouth was never made for disagreeable speeches," and putting his arm round the girl's slim waist, Joe gave her a sounding kiss.

"Oh, Joe, you baby! when will you leave off those youthful tricks of yours? How often am I to tell you that it is not seemly of you to—oh, good gracious!" Miss Rendlesham gave vent to the words in a sort of shriek, for there in the doorway, facing them with an expression of sarcastic wonder upon his handsome face, stood Captain Talbot. Grace coloured crimson under her rouge. That he should imagine her fast, frivolous, and vulgar was one thing, but that he should catch her in the very act of being kissed by a young man to whom she was not even engaged was horrible to think of. She felt as though

she shouild shrink into the earth. For some moments there was silence.

"I came back to know—Miss Durnford sent me to ask for her skates." Captain Talbot's tones were hesitating, his eyes shone with an angry light.

"I don't know where Miss Durnford's skates are; I certainly don't keep them in my pocket. You had better ring for her maid and inquire their whereabouts of *her*," and without another look at him Miss Rendlesham swept haughtily from the room.

Could Captain Talbot have followed her to her own apartments, he would have been not a little astonished to see her throw herself down upon the sofa and give way to a violent burst of weeping. "What must he think of me? What must he think of me?" she repeated over and over again between her sobs; then becoming calmer, she rose, bathed her face, and with a stamp of her foot, and a "Well, I don't care a bit what *he* or any one else thinks of me!" put on her hat, and took her way out of the house and across the park to the woods.

"Am I to congratulate you?" Captain Talbot asked sarcastically, as Miss Rendlesham left the room, and the "click-click" of her high-heeled shoes died away in the distance.

"Eh?" said Joe, wonderingly, as he turned from the window, and faced the speaker.

"I said am I to congratulate you?" Lionel said again, more sarcastically than before.

"What about?" The blue eyes opened wide.

"Well, from the tender little scene I came upon just now, I imagine you must be in the lucky position of Miss Rendlesham's accepted suitor," with a short laugh.

"What? Oh, lor!" Joe uttered his favourite exclamation with more than usual gusto, then throwing himself into a chair, laughed long and loudly. "Oh, I say!" between the gasps. "You'll be the death of me, you know! You really will! I, Grace's suitor! What an awful lark! I'll tell her; won't she be over it? It's as good as a play. But really, Lionel, you don't mean it?" ceasing to laugh and regarding Captain Talbot in open astonishment.

"Mean it? Of course I do," rather nettled. "If you go kissing a girl like that, there must be something in it—hang it all!"

"But I often kiss Grace, she doesn't mind it," Joe answered innocently. "We had been quarrelling, and I was making it up, that is all."

"Oh," said Lionel, shortly. "So Miss Rendlesham doesn't mind being kissed, does she?"

"Well, she doesn't mind *me*, but then I'm like her own brother. I don't expect she would let anybody else. *You*, for instance," laughing again.

"I don't think she would ever have the chance either one way or the other," Lionel replied, shortly. "I don't care for such gushing damsels."

"I'm sure Grace isn't gushing!" Joe exclaimed, hotly. "You wouldn't say so if you knew her as well as I do."

"Thanks, but I know her quite well enough," Captain Talbot said, with a shrug of his broad shoulders. "Are you coming for a walk, Joe?"

"Miss Burnford and her sister are gushing now, if you like," Mr. Armitage went on, taking no notice of the invitation. "How I do hate those girls! They are a perfect nightmare to me!"

"They are, at any rate, refined and ladylike," Lionel remarked sententiously.

"And so, I am sure, is Grace," Joe began, with rising wrath; then remembering how little reason Captain Talbot had to agree with him, he gave a half-sigh of regret at Grace's odd whim, and stopped short.

"I am going back to the pond; will you come?" Lionel asked again, as he pulled out his cigar-case and examined its contents.

"Yes, I may as well; it has left off snowing, and we might as well skate a bit before lunch. I wonder where Grace is?"

"I don't believe the pond will bear much longer; it looks awfully shaky this morning," Captain Talbot remarked, as they left the house. He had evidently forgotten all about his errand, for Miss Durnford's skates remained unasked-for upon the hall table, and he never even glanced at them, as he took his own down from the peg on the hat-stand.

"I dare say there will be one spot quite safe, though; at any rate one can but try," and Mr. Armitage buttoned his ulster up to his chin, lit his pipe, and trudged off down the drive in lazy self-complacency.

"Oh, Captain Talbot, they say the pond isn't safe, and I really must skate this morning. I am dying to practise the outside edge, and you said you would help me, didn't you?"

"By Jove! I'm awfully sorry. I really quite forgot your skates. How very provoking of me!" Lionel's face took an expression of annoyance, while poor Letitia, who had been boasting to everybody that Captain Talbot had actually gone all the

way home to fetch something for her, looked decidedly snubbed.

"Never mind, it doesn't matter," trying to smile; "I'll send Miss Porter. Jane!" raising her voice that it might reach the ears of the little companion, who was talking to the weak-eyed curate at the edge of the pond. "Come here, I want you." Miss Porter meekly obeyed, while Mr. Bland took himself off in another direction. "Go up to the house and fetch my skates. A walk will do you more good than standing gossiping in the cold. Make haste."

A flush of indignation rose in Miss Porter's gentle face, reflected in a twofold intensity in that of the Captain, at Miss Durnford's rudeness. "I could not think of allowing Miss Porter to suffer for my neglect," Lionel said courteously; "I will go back for your skates."

"Oh, dear no," Miss Letitia exclaimed eagerly, for she had no notion of losing again the society of the handsome young fellow who had already made an impression upon her very susceptible heart. "Jane will be glad of the exercise, I know. Go, Jane, at once." Miss Porter turned meekly away, and set off towards the house.

"Well, if Miss Porter goes on my errand the least I can do is to accompany her," Captain Talbot said quickly; and before the astonished Letitia could utter a single remonstrance, he had already reached the side of the long-suffering companion.

Miss Durnford looked after them with an expression of wrath and hate, then rushed up to her sister. "Dora, look there," pointing in the direction in which Miss Porter and her companion were walking slowly along, he bending his handsome head to hear some remark of hers, and looking like a giant beside the small, fragile form.

"What is the matter?" gasped Dora. "What are they doing?"

"Doing! Why, don't you see that this wretched little chaperone of ours is carrying on a secret flirtation with Captain Talbot under our very noses? A mean, deceitful cat! I shall give her warning this very day!"

"But, my dear Letty, she is so very plain?" and Miss Dora tossed her light curls in simpering complacency.

"So she may be; but handsome men always do admire ugly women. I've noticed it over and over again."

"I can't think what we shall do without her; she is so very helpful," sighed Dora.

"Just like you, you are so selfish!" her sister retorted spitefully. "But helpful or not, she shall go, that I am determined."

Meanwhile, the two who were the cause of this outburst on Miss Durnford's part were quietly proceeding on their errand.

"I really do not like taking you all the way back, Captain Talbot," Miss Porter said timidly, glancing up into the dark, handsome face above her.

"You need not mind about it if I like to come," he replied kindly. "Besides, it was I who ought to have gone, not you."

"Oh, no, indeed, I am so used to running about, and—"

"Being generally useful to those two selfish girls," put in Captain Talbot, as she paused.

"They do not think, that is where it is; and thoughtlessness is, perhaps, more than selfishness, the reason they are sometimes unkind," the little companion said deprecatingly.

"I am sure they don't deserve to have you stick up for them; it makes my blood boil when I think of the things I have heard them say to you before us all," Lionel Talbot exclaimed vehemently.

Jane Porter's eyes filled with tears. "They are not kind to me always, certainly," she faltered. "If only they were like dear Miss Rendlesham, now, how happy I should be! She is always so kind to me."

Captain Talbot did not answer. A stolid look of indifference clouded his face.

"Miss Rendlesham," continued his companion, totally unconscious of the effect of her words, "is one in a thousand—so gentle, so considerate. Don't you think so?" pleadingly.

"I cannot say I admire Miss Rendlesham," Lionel replied stiffly.

"Ah, that is because you do not know her. I think certainly she has altered in appearance and manner, and I am sorry to see it, but her heart is the same, so generous, so amiable. Once when I was staying here with the Miss Durnfords, I was laid up with a sprained ankle, and Miss Rendlesham came every day to see me, bringing me books, and fruit, and flowers, like a ministering angel. I got to love her in those days. I love her still," musingly.

"I cannot understand anybody so fast and frivolous as Miss Rendlesham appears giving another thought to any one besides herself," Captain Talbot said, half satirically.

"No, that is what I cannot make out. She is so strange, so altered, I cannot think what has come over her. Only to me does she seem the same as ever. To others her manner is certainly not what it might be. Talking of angels, here she comes." There

was an accent of delight in the tones in which Miss Porter concluded her sentence, which left no doubt as to the sincerity of her attachment to the heiress.

Captain Talbot watched the tall, graceful figure, as Grace advanced towards them, clad in a long sealskin jacket bordered with some rich dark fur, a small cap of the same upon her curly yellow hair. A pair of skates swung from her hand, in the other she carried a large bouquet of hot-house flowers, making a brilliant bit of colour against the dark, wintry landscape.

She bestowed a sweet smile upon Miss Porter, a frown upon Captain Talbot. "Where are you off to?" she asked, addressing the former.

"To the house to fetch Letitia's skates," was the smiling answer.

"Do you mean to say she sent you for them, and that you," turning to Lionel, "let her come?"

"Indeed, Captain Talbot was most kind; he offered to go instead, and—"

"Miss Durnford would not let me," put in Lionel, laughing.

"Oh!" Miss Rendlesham looked at him keenly. "Well, I won't detain you, I'm going down to the pond to skate. Is Joe there?"

"Yes; but, Miss Rendlesham, may I suggest that you do not venture on till somebody—" hesitating—"till I have seen that it is quite safe. Please do not."

Grace looked at him wonderingly. "Joe is down there; he will know, thank you," she said haughtily, making as though she would pass on.

"Miss Rendlesham, do be persuaded. Wait till Captain Talbot gets back; indeed, you must not endanger your life!" Miss Porter's soft voice was full of eager pleading, as she laid a detaining hand on the girl's arm.

Grace laughed. "Nonsense, Miss Porter, I shall be quite safe; and *Joe*," laying a stress upon the name, "will take care of me."

"Won't you go with her now, Captain Talbot? I can quite well go up and fetch Miss Durnford's skates alone, and it would be so much safer," Miss Porter urged.

Lionel hesitated. "Yes, if Miss Rendlesham will allow me, I shall be most happy to go with her," he said coldly.

"But Miss Rendlesham will not *think* of allowing you," the girl said, laughing loudly. "She prefers to go alone, and besides"—looking full at him—"I have to go and bestow this bouquet upon one of my numerous adorers on my way down." She turned away as she spoke, and walked quickly down the drive—while Captain

Talbot's lips took their most sarcastic curl and Miss Porter looked vexed.

"She is certainly very strange," she murmured. "I cannot think what has come to her; but Mrs. Grey, her companion, comes soon, so perhaps then she will be her old innocent self again," with a sigh.

"It is to be hoped she will," said Lionel, coldly.

When Miss Porter and her companion once more arrived at the pond with the missing skates, they found it the scene of gay bustle and excitement. Several more venturesome among the skaters were dancing a quadrille in the middle, and loud cries of approval and applause echoed from the audience upon the bank. To a practical eye the ice looked most unsafe, large fissures appearing in many places, over which the water flowed, splashing the skaters, as the ice rocked beneath their weight. Miss Durnford immediately enlisted Captain Talbot's services in the fastening on of her skates, and afterwards in the practice of the outside edge, so that for some time his attention was wholly occupied. At last, however, Letitia declared she must rest awhile, so assisting her to the bank, he left her, and skated off to where most of the ladies and gentlemen were assembled. Conspicuous among them for her height, and the grace of her movements, was Miss Rendlesham; and Lionel could not but admire the easy elegance with which she skimmed like a bird over the smooth surface, her blue eyes sparkling, the red lips parted a little to show the gleaming white teeth.

He made his way to her side with a smile. "Miss Rendlesham, shall we have a turn together?" She placed her hands in his in silence, and side by side they sped away over the ice. In spite of his dislike to her, of his resolutions to avoid her for the future, Captain Talbot could not repress a thrill of pleasure as the little hands closed round his, the slight form touched him now and then in their progress. Oh, if she were only more like other girls, less fast and vulgar! he could almost—

"A penny for your thoughts, Captain!" The loud voice, with its drawling, lisping tones, struck like a bomb-shell on his ear.

"They ~~were~~ not worth a penny, Miss Rendlesham, for they hinged upon such an improbability that consequently they were utter foolishness," he replied, somewhat curtly.

"That's a pity!" she said, laughing; "but a penny is such a small sum, I think I could have afforded it, even for foolishness. At any rate, I will chance losing it

if you will tell me what you were thinking of that made your lips curl and your eyes flash as they did just now; I was frightened!"—with another loud laugh.

"My thoughts were rather vague ones. I was trying to fancy how we should feel if we could see ourselves as others see us—if we could know ourselves as others know us—would it, I wonder, make us act and think differently?" He spoke thoughtfully, almost sternly.

Miss Rendlesham turned her head to look up at him. "I don't think it would do us much good to see ourselves as *some* people see us. We should live in a world of perpetual humiliation and self-condemnation till we should only long and pray for oblivion, and for a place wherein to hide our unworthy heads," she said gently—so gently that Lionel was startled.

"But would it not be better to try and alter our conduct, so that we might experience a new feeling of self-satisfaction taking the place of the humiliation in our minds?" he asked, a slight smile of triumph curling his lip under the drooping moustache, for she was taking his hint more amiably than he expected.

"That may be your idea; it would not be mine. I have far too good an opinion of myself," Grace said, going back to her loud, drawling tone. "If you think well of yourself, every one else will think well of you too, they say."

"I do not believe it. Take a vain, conceited young fop of the period, for instance, or a fast and frivolous girl, what good does their self-conceit do them in the eyes of the world?"

"As much good as the bombast and self-sufficiency of those who consider themselves their superiors," retorted Miss Rendlesham, an angry light coming into her eyes, for the words "fast and frivolous girl" had pointed out to her the drift of his words. "I will go on by myself now, Captain Talbot; thanks for your assistance so far." And with a merry smile she withdrew her hands from his, and set off alone in the opposite direction.

Once out of range of his eyes, the girl's face flushed angrily. How dare he presume to lecture her, and tell her to her face that she was fast and frivolous? The very words he had used before in the letter! Oh, how she hated him! She would—

Miss Rendlesham! Grace! for Heaven's sake come back; you will fall in!" The voice of her enemy sounded in her ears, but she would not listen. Onward she went in her mad course; the ice creaked and swayed beneath her

weight. She heard him call again, "Come back; do come back!"

There was a sharp crack, a cry of horror and alarm, and then Grace felt the ice give way, and she was precipitated into the cold, dark water.

Only a moment it seemed. She struggled to free herself; then she felt herself seized by the hands, vainly trying to grasp the slippery edge, and forcibly dragged from her perilous position to a place of safety on the green bank of the pond. So suddenly had it all passed that the girl felt dazed and almost unconscious with the shock and the sound of the rushing water in her ears. She sat down upon the grassy edge, and burst into tears. Captain Talbot stood looking at her in silence.

"Why did you do it? Why did you not stop when I called to you?" he said sternly. "You must have known how dangerous it was, and that you were rushing headlong to your death."

"I did not know it. You—you are very unkind," her tears flowing afresh.

"Come and get your wet things off as quickly as you can," Lionel said, more kindly, as he held out his hand to help her to her feet.

"I cannot walk in my skates," Grace said, a half-smile curling her lips.

"No, of course not, how stupid of me! Let me unfasten them for you." He knelt at her side, whilst she held out her foot, in its pretty little French boot and bright Acme skate, for him to unfasten the latter.

He would have liked to linger over his task; it was all too sweet to have the graceful form so near him, all too sweet (he acknowledged the truth) to have her restored to him from the jaws of death. He might put it aside, but the feeling in his heart now was no dislike, no feeling of disgusted aversion, it was deep, tender love!

But a shiver from Miss Rendlesham hastened his movements: he took the skates in his hand, gave the other to the girl, and in silence they took their way across the snowy field towards Pentallwn Castle.

"Have you hurt your hand?" Grace asked the question politely, as she noticed him looking at it somewhat ruefully.

"I sprained it, I think; it is nothing, though."

"Did you sprain it when you fished me out of the water?" looking at him curiously.

"Yes—I—a piece of ice—"

"Now, don't prevaricate, you know you did it in my service, and that if it hadn't been for you I should have been drowned. Oh, Captain Talbot, don't think me ungrate-

ful; indeed, *indeed I am not!*" She laid her hand upon his arm, her sweet blue eyes looked up at him full of tears. "How can I thank you?" she said softly.

They were in the middle of a small wood which divided the park from the rest of the estate. No sound broke the stillness but the distant rushing brook, and the crackle of the leaves beneath their feet. At the sight of the fair face, pale now from recent fright, at the blue eyes so soft and innocent, looking up gratefully into his own, Captain Talbot forgot his recent bitter feelings against the heiress, forgot her fast manners, her painted face and towzled hair, forgot the draggled appearance she presented now in her dripping garments, and which at any other time he would have regarded as a fresh jar to his fastidiousness, forgot his good manners, honour, and manhood, and throwing his arms suddenly round the astonished girl, kissed her lips, and hair, and face. Then his passion wore itself out, and he stood before her, sullen and ashamed, his eyes on the ground, his face flushed with self-reproach.

For some moments there was silence—a silence awful and overwhelming. Grace stood gasping and white, her breath coming and going in quick, short intervals from her parted lips. Then she spoke. "Captain Talbot, I hated and despised you before you came, because I heard you spoken of as a lady-killer, and a hero above your fellows. I hated you when you came, because I saw how much superior you thought yourself to every one else—how much you looked down upon each and every person around you. But the hate and contempt I felt for you then are nothing to the hate and contempt I feel for you now! You are unworthy the name of a man, far less a gentleman! Never dare to speak to me again, so long as we are in the house together; and I pray that as far as I am concerned that time may be short." She turned away as she spoke, walking quickly towards a little gate, leading to the park.

Lionel followed her. "Miss Rendlesham—Grace! oh, stay and hear me! I love you!" The words came low and hoarse from his lips as he reached her side. She laughed, a bitter, sarcastic laugh, then it died away, and once more the angry flush mounted to her brow.

"You love me? Truly, you are a strange wooer. But think not that you will deceive me by your mocking words! I don't believe a single syllable of it! Not *one!*" she repeated emphatically, seeing that he was about to speak. "I have told you I hate and despise you, I tell you so again.

Leave me, I will not stay another instant in your company—you are a cowardly, ungentlemanly man!"

Before Captain Talbot had time to recover from his amazement at her vehemence, she had gone, and he watched her slight figure disappear round a bend in the park, without offering to move or follow in her footsteps.

#### CHAPTER IV.

**D**INNER at the Castle was a ponderous meal, dragging out the courses like an alderman's banquet. To-night it seemed to Grace Rendlesham to drag out longer than usual, as she sat by Captain Talbot's side, and watched the dishes passing endlessly round the table. Fain would she have declined his unwelcome escort when Lady Armitage bade Lionel Talbot "take in Miss Rendlesham," but she could not draw attention to their open quarrel, so she moved off beside him in haughty silence, just touching with the tips of her jewelled fingers his proffered arm. The gorgeousness of her costume on this evening was heightened by every means in her power. A white satin dress, embroidered in huge sunflowers, trailed yards on the ground behind her. A coronet of gold filagree was bound round her fair hair, which to-night she wore classically plain, while heavy gold ornaments covered her neck and arms, and long pendants of the same weighed down the small ears. Her face was painted and powdered as usual, and the scarlet lips were heightened by artistic colouring.

On the other side of Grace sat George Middleton, too engrossed with Minna Armitage (with whom he was carrying on a tender flirtation) to have eyes or ears for any one else. Grace's eyes wandered off to the opposite side, where Joe was sitting between the two Miss Durnfords, and poor little Miss Porter, looking pale and haggard, was trying to appear interested in what the Rector was telling her about some new style of church architecture, while Mr. Bland, the curate, grew apoplectic in his violent efforts to attract her attention.

"You are not eating anything, Miss Rendlesham?" The voice of Captain Talbot broke in upon her reverie, cold and courteous. She leaned back in her chair, vouchsafing him no answer.

"Are you still angry with me?" His voice was low, the tones winning, but Grace did not speak, or give one answering look at the grey eyes which were watching her so intently. Captain Talbot turned away

at last, and addressed some trivial remark to the Rector's fat, homely-looking spouse, who sat on the other side of him. He bided his time, but his determination to make Miss Rendlesham speak to him, and listen to his pleadings for forgiveness for the rash act of the morning, remained unshaken. With singular adroitness, he managed to place the leg of his chair on the long trailing end of the white satin gown. When the ladies moved she would be obliged to ask him to release her. The moment came at last. The Rector's wife stopped short in the midst of a long harangue upon the coming Christmas school-treat, and rose in answer to Lady Armitage's look. Now Grace must speak to him; once more the blue eyes would look at him—coldly, no doubt, but that would be better than nothing.

"Joe!" The loud voice fell clear as a bell across the table.

"Yes, Grace."

"Come here."

Joe made his way past the ladies, who were filing out one by one, and reached Miss Rendlesham's side.

"Take that chair off my dress."

In courtesy bound, Captain Talbot instantly rose, but without a glance or word of thanks, Grace swept past him and the astonished Joe, and left the room in the wake of the other ladies.

"Halloo, Lionel! been having a tussle? By Jingo! but I wouldn't be in your shoes if you have put Grace out! she'll never make it up."

"Miss Rendlesham has chosen to take offence at nothing—it is no concern of mine," was the cold reply.

"Strange, after your saving her life, too, this morning; she told me all about it."

"What did she say?" eagerly.

"Oh, nothing, only that she tumbled into that hole, all through going near it, when you told her not, and that you had fished her out and hurt your wrist in doing it, and how very grateful she was."

"Magnanimous, certainly," Lionel Talbot muttered to himself, as Joe left him and went back to his place; "but she shall forgive me yet, ay, and love me!"

When Miss Rendlesham joined the ladies she found them all talking at once, and plying the footman with questions, who stood in the middle of the room, like a prisoner at the bar.

"Can we see it?"

"Who saw it first?"

"Have they telegraphed for the fire-engines?"

"How long is it since it began?"

"Where did you first hear of it?"

The unfortunate footman, a new-comer, and very bashful, grew fiery red under the gaze of so many eyes, and his answers were so incoherent that Grace, who had been vainly trying to make out the cause of the hubbub, gave up at last in despair.

"Go down and tell your master at once, and see what he says about your going to help. Don't all go. Simmonds had better stay to bring up the tea," Lady Armitage said.

"Whatever is the matter?" Miss Rendlesham at last managed to ask, as the man left the room.

"The cottages down at the end of the park, just at the beginning of the village, have caught fire, and are burning furiously, they say. I cannot make out when the fire began, but, from what Charles says, they cannot get enough hands to help, and nobody thought of telegraphing for the engine till half an hour ago, it seems."

"How shocking! Cannot something be done?"

"I don't know. I have sent to Sir John to see. Grace, dear, may I trouble you for my bag of coloured silks? Thank you, love," and Lady Armitage sank languidly into a chair, and began a long discussion with Mrs. Morton, the Rector's wife, about the distribution of the coals and blankets for Christmas.

"What is the matter, Miss Porter?" Grace went over to where the little companion was sitting in a corner by the window, and laid her hand on her shoulder. Miss Porter started, and lifted a pair of tear-filled eyes to the blue ones looking down so compassionately upon her.

"Tell me, can I help you?" The low, sweet voice would have startled and amazed Lionel Talbot not a little could he have heard it, but he was safe for another hour at least. Grace had no fear of his approach.

"Nothing—at least nothing that I ought to tell you, dear Miss Rendlesham. Do not ask me."

"But I shall ask you, and I must have an answer. Have those girls been plaguing you again. I wonder you put up with them. I wouldn't!"

"They have given me notice to-day, and—and Miss Letitia said such dreadful things to me. I couldn't repeat them; and oh, dear Miss Rendlesham, what shall I do? I have a sick mother at home, and young brothers and sisters—so many mouths to feed. What shall I do if I cannot get another situation, and Miss Letitia declares she will not speak for me?" Tears came in a shower at the close of the speech, and for some moments Miss Porter wept bitterly.

"Do not cry. You shall come and stay with me when you leave them, and we will see about something else for you, far better than what you are doing now. I will speak to Mrs. Grey; she is coming to-morrow, and she will help us. Dry your eyes, and don't breathe a word of having told me, and I will help you."

"You are so kind, my dear, how can I thank you?" murmured Miss Porter, wiping her eyes.

"By looking happy again. Come and play me something. Oh, here are the gentlemen." Grace's tones resumed their usual harsh drawl as she spoke the last words.

Sir John came in all excitement. "My dear, if the ladies will excuse me, I shall just go down and see about this fire; it may be serious if it spreads, and something ought to be done at once."

"I shall go with you, father," said Joe.

"And I," "And I," said George Middleton and Captain Talbot.

Grace felt relieved. She dreaded that Lionel would take the opportunity of the presence of so many people to torment her with further conversation. Now, however, he was going out, and she could enjoy herself for a whole evening freed from his obnoxious presence.

The departure of the gentlemen was the signal for general *ennui* on the part of Letitia Durnford and her sister, who subsided into two arm-chairs, the one with a book of photographs over which she dozed unobserved, the other with an interminable strip of black satin, upon which she was stitching leaves of all sorts, colours, and sizes, withered, fresh, and turning to red, in stiff, unnatural sprays, interspersed with many-hued and impossible flowersto match. Lady Armitage, the Rector and his wife, and Mr. Bland sat down to whist, over which Mr. Morton was in the habit of using strong and unclerical expressions, and generally forgetting his holy office, while Mr. Bland, being of an absent disposition, was several times on the point of losing his curacy through inadvertent mistakes in following the lead of his reverend brother-minister.

Grace went to the piano to sing, Miss Porter playing her accompaniments; and as the sweet strains floated through the room, it seemed as though an angel should have been singing rather than the gaily dressed painted-butterfly looking girl, whose manners were so little in accordance with the refined grandeur of her vocal powers.

It was past eleven o'clock when Sir John Armitage and the other gentlemen returned.

The Rector and his wife had taken their departure, as had also Mr. Bland ; and the ladies were beginning to yawn surreptitiously behind their fans, and make up their minds not to wait up any longer for tidings of the doomed cottages. Lady Armitage had risen and laid aside her work with a "Really, I am sure we had better go to bed ; they may not be home for hours yet," when the door was flung open and Sir John entered, flurried and breathless, the sleeve of his coat hanging in festoons, and his face and hands black with smoke. After him came the others, looking no less dilapidated, Captain Talbot with his arm in a sling, his face white and weary, and the appearance of great exhaustion about his whole bearing.

"Ladies, I have brought you a hero !" Sir John exclaimed in his loud, cheery tones. "This fellow," pushing Lionel forward, "saved a woman and child at the risk of his own life."

"Don't, Sir John ; you make me quite uncomfortable," the "hero" answered, a wan smile illumining his pale features, "I only did what any other man would have done in my place. The poor woman was ill"—turning to Lady Armitage—"and her husband, who was busy at the pumps, seemed to have either forgotten her or trusted her to the care of somebody else. At any rate, there she was, up in a little back garret, and would have been burned to death if I had not happened to hear her cries in time to get her out of the burning cottage."

"And the child ?" The words came from Grace ; she had hung upon his story with her large blue eyes fixed on his face, forgetting her resolution never to speak to him again, in her interest about the fire and its results. At the sudden flushing of the dark face, and the glance she received from the grey, passionate eyes, she remembered all too late the slip she had made.

"Tell me about the child, Joe." Miss Rendlesham turned her back before Captain Talbot could answer her, and seizing upon Joe, led him away to the window, where a long whispered conversation took place.

"Poor things ! they are in a sad plight," Sir John said pityingly—"burnt out of house and home, and Marsham away, too ; that stingy bailiff of his won't do much to help them. We must get up a subscription somehow ; I shall have to go round with the hat to-morrow. Hind, the bailiff, says he can't rebuild the cottages till he hears from his master."

"Well, he could scarcely rebuild them on his own responsibility, could he ?" Lady

Armitage said languidly. "George, my candle, if you don't mind ; I have dropped my needle."

"I must go and see after them to-morrow—that poor woman and the baby," Minna said, "and take them some warm blankets ; it is so dreadful to think of so many houseless creatures this bitter night."

"Perhaps, Minna, you would like to invite them here for Christmas ?" the loud voice of the heiress called from the other end of the room.

"Perhaps I should," she retorted, laughing, as she gathered up her work and followed the other ladies from the room.

"Don't forget, Joe ; good-night—don't dream of fire and wake us all up in the middle of the night on a false alarm," and with a light laugh Miss Rendlesham tripped from the room.

"Come downstairs, boys, and have a pipe and a glass of toddy after your exertions," Sir John said jovially, putting his head in at the door on his way to the smoking-room. The young men needed no second bidding, and soon Lionel Talbot stood alone by the blazing fire in deep and gloomy thought. His arm was paining him a good deal, making him feel sick and faint, while mortified regret at the effects of his recent behaviour towards the heiress added to his feelings of misery. He could not join the trio in the smoking-room. Their conversation would weary him to death ; he would go straight to bed. Perhaps by to-morrow—

The drawing-room door opened softly, and Grace entered. She came up to the fireplace and laid her hand on his arm. "Listen, Joe ! I have another idea, only don't breathe a word—Oh, Captain Talbot, I didn't know it was you. I beg your pardon." Her face had flushed crimson. Her head haughtily held on high showed that she regretted too late her mistake. With a low-spoken "Good evening," she would have passed him.

"Stay, Miss Rendlesham, for Heaven's sake !" He looked so white and wan, so sorrowful and full of pain, that the girl's tender heart was touched. She waited beside him.

"What can you want with me after this morning ?" The voice was low and sweet, in spite of the reproach conveyed in the words.

"Only to tell you how sorry I am, and ask your forgiveness. If you only knew how I have suffered to-day, you would not withhold it." The tender grey eyes were fixed appealingly on hers. Grace was touched by their expression.

"I forgive you," she said gently. "I am

only sorry you should have thought so badly of me as to act as you did to-day."

"I do not think badly of you; Heaven forbid! I—" A sharp spasm of pain contracted his face. He staggered into a chair.

"Oh! what is the matter? You are ill—faint! Can I get you anything?" She spoke gently, pityingly, her face full of womanly sympathy.

"No, thanks; it is my arm. It pains me so. It will pass off soon."

"But you must have something done for it at once. I will call—"

"No; don't trouble. I will get my man to look to it presently. A burning rafter struck it, and I had not time to have it seen to at the time. It is better now," faintly.

"Will you let me look at it? I am a very good dresser of wounds. Perhaps I could get you something for it." With gentle fingers she had untied the sling from his neck, all her enmity forgotten in thought of his suffering. Then insisting upon his removing his coat, she unfastened the studs from his wristband, and almost screamed as her eyes fell upon the wound. From the elbow to the wrist his arm seemed to have been literally cut through, and the badly-arranged bandage was soaked with blood.

"The doctor must be sent for at once; in the meantime I can perhaps make you more comfortable," she said, and without heeding his words of protest, she glided quickly from the room, her gorgeous satin dress trailing behind her. In about five minutes she returned, followed by a maid carrying a bowl of water and bandages.

"I have sent for Doctor Milman," she said, as she took off her bracelets, and the many rings which adorned the slim white fingers. Then taking the injured arm, she gently bathed and bandaged it, talking all the time in a soft, gentle voice, to distract his attention from the pain she knew he must be enduring.

"That will do, Martin, you can take the bowl away;" then as the maid retired, "You feel easier now, don't you?"

"You are an angel!" he murmured, looking up at her with adoring eyes.

"Don't say so, pray," laughing, "I shall shock you again to-morrow, and make you think me fast, frivolous, and vulgar; but I must wish you good-night, and hope your arm will be better in the morning."

She gathered up her rings and bracelets from the table, and swept away, leaving him sorely puzzled and disappointed. She had not offered to shake hands. Could it be that he was still unforgiven? What a

tender, womanly heart lay under the worldly exterior! What an angel she would be if only she could be made to discard her eccentricities of dress and manner! Heigho! how he loved her, in spite of them all!

## CHAPTER V.

**W**HERE is Grace?" Lady Armitage said next morning, when breakfast was half over and the heiress had not made her appearance.

"Here, Lady Armitage," a voice replied before any one could answer, and Miss Rendlesham entered the room, arrayed in a costume of bright blue plush, buttoned down the front with large brass buttons. "I am sorry to be late, awfully sorry, but that fool of a Martin never called me. Thanks, Mr. Middleton, don't move. I'd as soon sit me down yonder," moving away as she spoke to a seat by Captain Talbot, in whose fastidious ears the words "that fool of a Martin" were still tingling.

Not a trace of her last night's gentle mood was visible, either in her manner or face, which latter was rouged and powdered as usual.

"Arm better?" she said, as she seated herself.

"Much better, thanks," coldly.

"That's all right," cheerfully. "Joe, give me some ham. Where's Sir John?" Miss Rendlesham glanced round the table as she asked the question.

"Gone after those people who were burnt out last night; and it is so tiresome; he has carried away the key of the postbag with him, and we cannot get at the letters. He is so painfully energetic, one would think he was quite a young man!" Lady Armitage sighed, as though her husband were past reclamation.

"It is rather silly of him to go off so early and take so much trouble to see after poor people like them. Now if they were rich it would be different, wouldn't it, Captain Talbot?" turning to him abruptly.

"I don't understand you, Miss Rendlesham," he answered coldly.

"No, of course you don't. Nobody does; but, then, you see, I say what everybody thinks. It comes easier in the long run. Everybody toadies people who are rich," and Miss Rendlesham looked round defiantly, as much as to say, "You see, I know all of you think well of me for the same reason."

At this moment the door opened, and Sir John entered. "Only think, Mary," he began eagerly, "some lady has been to

Hind the bailiff this morning and offered to head a subscription for rebuilding the cottages with a hundred pounds, if he will begin at once. She also left enough money with him to provide lodgings for those who have nothing left, and promised several of them to buy them furniture, &c., when the new cottages are built. I told Hind I would give another hundred, so he won't wait now for Markham's permission, but will set the work in hand at once. I can't think who it can be. The lady would not give her name, or say where she came from, and Hind said she seemed very anxious to keep her share in the matter a secret."

"Very strange. It must have been Miss de Greffe. She is very eccentric, you know." Miss de Greffe and Lady Armitage did not get on very well together.

"No; it was a young lady, Hind said, with dark hair, and a suspicion of a moustache on her upper lip. I remember because the description tickled me so," and Sir John laughed again at the recollection.

"What an idiot she must be to waste her money like that!" came in loud tones from Miss Rendlesham, as she rose and left the table.

"Who is going down to the church this morning?" Letitia Durnford asked, but looking only at Captain Talbot.

"I don't think I am fit for much in the way of decorating," he replied smiling, and answering her glance.

"I shall go; I have the font to do," Minna said, rising from the table.

"Then I may come and help you?"

Minna looked up at George Middleton's lazy, good-tempered face, eager enough now, with the love-light in the blue eyes—and with a soft smile and rising colour she said softly, "Yes, if you like. Grace has undertaken the chancel—she decorates so beautifully—I wonder what time she is going?"

"Miss Rendlesham asked me to help her. I think she is going early," Miss Porter put in timidly, with a deprecating glance at Miss Durnford and her sister.

"Of course, if Miss Rendlesham wants you, you must go. An heiress is of more consequence than us every-day people," Letitia said, spitefully.

"If you want me, Miss Letitia, of course I will not—"

"Oh, we don't want you," tossing her head; "you are not of so much consequence as all that." Miss Porter looked vexed and uncomfortable, but she said nothing. Words she knew were useless where the Misses Durnford were concerned.

It was late before the party left the church, and darkness had closed around, making the snow-clad landscape look weird and ghost-like. No moon shed her glistening beams over the scene, no stars twinkled brightly in the cloudy sky—all was blackness overhead; and Grace shivered slightly as she drew her fur cloak more closely round her.

"Are you cold?" Captain Talbot, who had walked along in silence by her side, asked the question with polite indifference, as if the answer were of no consequence.

"Yes, rather; the church was chilly," was the equally indifferent reply.

Across the fields in front of them were the figures of their fellow-workers—the two Durnfords and Frank Morton (the Rector's son), Minna, and George Middleton, Miss Porter, and the curate. Grace wished they would not walk two and two, it looked so lover-like; and here were she and Captain Talbot, sworn foes as they were, bringing up the rear.

"Shall we not get on a little faster and join the others?" she said coldly.

"Certainly, if you wish it; but it strikes me we should be most unwelcome intruders," he replied, with a low laugh.

"How silly people are!" Miss Rendlesham said, snappishly.

"*A propos* of what?" in an amused tone.

"Why cannot they all walk together?" The girl said the words still snappishly, then laughed. Captain Talbot came closer to her, and bent his head to hers.

"Because they love each other," he said, softly.

"How do you know?" glancing up curiously, though in the darkness she could not see his face.

"Do you think I do not discern in George he same symptoms which are rendering my own life a burden to me just now? He is to be envied, for if I mistake not Miss Armitage returns his affection." He spoke the words in a low tone, but without turning his head from the contemplation of the dark forms showing out so clearly against the snowy field.

For some moments Grace did not speak, then she said, "And Miss Porter and Mr. Bland, and poor Frank Morton?" laughing.

"I prophesy that Miss Porter will not say nay when the curate asks her, and that Miss Letitia Durnford will be the only one left out in the cold. You see how observant I am," laughing rather bitterly.

"You will be able to supply Letitia's vacant hope. Why don't you go and walk with her now, and prevent her playing gooseberry to Dora and that silly youth?"

"Because I prefer walking with you," was the unexpected reply, spoken in a calm tone of proprietorship infinitely galling.

"But suppose I would rather walk by myself?"

"I do not think you would," quietly.

"How do you know?" loftily.

"Because between you and me there is a strange affinity—we were the greatest enemies a subtle influence would draw us together."

Miss Rendlesham laughed nervously. "You talk like a spiritualist," she said.

"I am not one; but I am a great believer in the power of will and the law of attraction between the souls of human beings. Were you ever mesmerised, Miss Rendlesham?"

"No, never; I should not like to be."

"I will try you some day."

"Indeed, you will not," decidedly.

They had reached the little gate leading to the grounds of Pentallwn Castle. As Captain Talbot stayed to unfasten it, a rather long process, on account of his maimed arm, the sound of the church bells came sweetly over the snow-clad fields—they stood, these two, both so beautiful in form and character, yet so far different, so wide apart, and listened to the faint sounds.

"Grace, is it to be peace and goodwill between us?" Lionel held open the gate for her to pass through, as he spoke. It was very dark, and as she passed him, so closely that her large Gainsborough hat brushed his cheek, he felt her start at his words; but she did not answer. They walked through the plantation, and up the terrace steps in silence. At the door of the house she paused—

"It shall be peace between us, if you will," she said gently, holding out her hand.

"And the goodwill?" he asked, as he took it in his.

"Will perhaps come later, when I cease to annoy you, and you are less—"

"Less what?"

"Less cross," laughing, and running indoors.

## CHAPTER VI.

**G**RACE, come here." Miss Rendlesham entered the drawing-room dressed for dinner, to find Joe Armitage standing before the looking-glass over the high mantelpiece, surveying with some little perturbation his handsome features.

"What is the matter?"

"I've gone and cut myself shaving, and this piece of plaster is so awfully unbecoming. I can't think—— Holla, Grace! discarded the fast and loud at last, eh?"

"Yes; Mrs. Grey is here, you know, and I should not like her to see me as I have been the last ten days; besides, it is Christmas Day to-morrow, and I couldn't enjoy it properly in all those horrid costumes," Grace replied, the colour rising into her cheeks. Like an angel she looked in her soft dress of pale blue satin, without any ornaments but the roses in her bosom. No powder or paint marred the sweet bloom of her fair complexion; no distorting "friz" took the place of the soft, curling hair on her brow. She looked the very picture of a high-bred, delicately-nurtured English maiden, as fair and queenly as the highest in the land.

"Don't I look nice?" she asked, surveying herself over Mr. Armitage's shoulder.

"Awfully swell. But I say, Grace, what will Lionel Talbot think?"

"I don't care a bit what he thinks," indifferent, as she drew her blue mittens further up the soft white arms, and settled their large blue bows complacently.

"We are going to have some private theatricals to-morrow night. Mother thought it would be a treat for the poor people after their tea. You know we always give them one, and last year we had a magic-lantern."

"Tableaux would be much better!" Grace exclaimed excitedly. "Who is going to act?"

"Well, Lionel said he would, if his arm is better, and Minna and George, and Dora Durnford, I suppose, and myself, and you, and——"

"Why not say everybody at once?" laughing; "but how do you know I will?"

"Oh, because you'll do anything I ask you. You are such a darling!" boisterously.

"Now, Joe!" warningly.

"Well, you are; I know who thinks so too, in spite of paint, and powder, and all——"

"Joe, if you talk like that I shall send you to Coventry on the spot."

"Well, I won't, then; but it's true, all the same. I say, Grace, let me take you down to dinner to-night. I know I shall have Dora Durnford if you don't, and she takes away my appetite."

"Poor dear, greedy boy!" laughing at the dolorous expression of his fair, youthful face.

"Captain Talbot, will you take Grace as usual?" Lady Armitage said, when the guests had assembled and dinner was announced.

Lionel looked round bewildered. Grace had her back to him on his somewhat tardy entrance, and he had not recognised her in the soft blue satin gown. "I do not see her," he said vaguely.

"I am here, though, close to you, and not so very small either!" came a laughing voice at his elbow; and Captain Talbot turned to discover such a vision of loveliness as made his very heart stand still. He could scarcely believe his eyes.

"Excuse me, Miss Rendlesham," he murmured hesitatingly, "I did not—"

"Recognise me? I dare say not. I am as changeable as the winds in spring. I wanted to say, do you mind taking in Mrs. Grey, my companion, instead of me? She is very nice, and poor Joe wants me so to let him take me down, because he is so afraid of being victimised by the Durnfords," laughing and lowering her voice.

"Certainly, if you wish it." The handsome face wore a disappointed look, which Grace was not slow to perceive. She said no more, however, though her lip had an amused curl, when she noticed the angry look darted at her cavalier, as they wended their way to the dining-room.

\* \* \* \*

It was the first half-hour after dinner, and the ladies had collected round the fire to await the return of the gentlemen. Grace had ensconced herself in a low chair, with Dandie in her lap, and as she pulled his long, silky ears, her thoughts took a wild leap into futurity, as she wondered where she would be next Christmas Eve, and whether—but Grace felt the hot colour mounting to her brow, she would not think of that subject. She wished now that she had not come to Pentallwn for Christmas, that she had stayed in her own beautiful home among the Welsh mountains, alone with Mrs. Grey, who loved her, and where there was nobody to call her fast and frivolous.

"Oh, but I assure you, Lady Armitage, I heard it from the very best authority; he must marry money." The soft lisping tones of Letitia Durnford broke in upon the current of Grace's thoughts. She listened to hear who she was talking about.

"It was Mr. Middleton who told me. I don't mind telling you, if you will be sure not to let *me* go any further, but Captain Talbot's father has threatened to cut him off with a shilling unless he marries an heiress." Letitia finished the sentence in a tone of triumph, and glanced at Grace to see the effect of her words; but to all intents and purposes Miss Rendlesham had fallen into a gentle doze.

"Are you all asleep?" said Sir John Armitage, as that gentleman entered the room, some time later. "You are so quiet—"

"We have been talking, but Grace wanted to listen to the bells, so we had to stop—"

"Come and hear them on the terrace, Grace," Joe said, going over to where she stood by the window.

"My dear, you will take cold." The words stayed Miss Rendlesham on her way from the room.

"No, dear, I shall wrap up well," she answered, turning to the soft-eyed, grey-haired woman who seemed old enough to be her mother.

"Take care, then," Mrs. Grey said, smiling as she looked at the sweet laughing face of her darling.

For some time the two figures paced up and down the terrace, talking and laughing in their gay young voices. "I say, Grace, let me have a smoke! it will be so jolly out here!" Joe said at last.

"Very well, only don't make me smell of cigars."

"Do you mind waiting here by yourself while I go and get a light? I shan't be two minutes." And then Grace found herself alone under the canopy of heaven, with only her thoughts for company.

"He must marry money!" she said to herself, repeating Letitia's words; and over the snow came the sound of the bells, saying in varied cadence the self-same words.

By-and-by approaching footsteps warned her of Joe's return. "Joe, why must Captain Talbot marry an heiress? Letitia Durnford said so; but it seems so strange, I thought he was very rich." She said the words musingly, but Joe was too much occupied evidently with his cigar to heed her, and by-and-by she went on, still looking over the fields towards where the distant lights in the church windows gave out a pale glow, and the bells chimed on to "hail the coming morn."

"Do you know, Joe, I feel sorry now I pretended to be fast, and frivolous, and worldly; it was a silly trick to play, wasn't it? And now I have given him—at least everybody, a false impression of me, and done no good. What did you say, Joe?" as he muttered something which she did not catch.

"I know very well you advised me not (was that what you said?), but I will tell you now, only don't tell any one again." She went nearer to him, and laid her hand on his arm. "I picked up a letter of yours, Joe, that day before *he*—before Captain Talbot and your cousin came, and

I was cross because you did not wait for me, so I read it all through, Joe, and it said that Captain Talbot would not go in for me, as Mr. Middleton was going to do, because he had heard I was fast, and frivolous, and worldly—"purse-proud" he called it. Then, Joe, I resolved to be what he said I was, to act as though I cared not for anything or anybody. Don't you think I did right, Joe?"

"Great heavens! No!"

Grace started away as though she had been shot, for the voice was not Joe's, it was that of Captain Talbot himself! Poor Grace felt as though she should welcome instant death as the greatest boon that could befall her. There was a dead silence.

"I thought you were Joe," faltered Miss Rendlesham in a faint voice.

"And yet I think the explanation you have so kindly given me was better bestowed than upon Joe," coldly.

"I can't help it; listeners never hear any good of themselves, you know"—trying to speak indifferently. "I am going in—"

"Not till I have said what I have to say," coming nearer, and taking her hands, both of them, in his, where they lay passive. "Grace, I came here, as you know, because my parents are wintering abroad on account of my mother's health, and because I did not relish the thought of spending Christmas in my lonely quarters at Aldershot. It is quite true that my father threatens to cut me off with a shilling if I do not marry money; it is equally true that I shall never marry at all unless I marry for love alone. I came here prepared to dislike you, because of your money, and because I knew that now there might be a chance of my being able to gratify my father's whim, which I resolved no power on earth should tempt me to do. When I saw you, dressed within an inch of your life, with all the attributes (pardon me, my darling—I know how false they were!) of a purse-proud, wealthy, vulgar young woman, I made up my mind that it would not be difficult to dislike and avoid you. Alas! vain hope! You were soon more to me (with all the characteristics which I hated so much) than any other woman on earth. I loved you as I never loved before! Nay, do not go! Stay a moment," as the little hands in his struggled to release themselves. "When I saw you to-night as you really were, in all your wealth of sweetest loveliness, I could bear it no longer. I resolved at once to know my fate; for if you cannot love me, if you still hate me, to-morrow's sun will see me far away from here, back again at Aldershot,

a lonely, disappointed man." He paused, and still holding her hands in his, waited for her to speak.

"I had not thought to marry," she began, and the sweet voice trembled; "and—and—"

"And what, sweet love? Oh, Grace, do not torture me! It cannot be that you still hate me, or that you love another? that Joe, whom you let kiss your lips and—"

"Oh, Captain Talbot, spare me!"

"Speak, Grace; it cannot be him! that boy, that mere—"

"Halloo, Grace! Sorry to have been so long, my dear, but the governor sent me all over the shop to find his spectacles, and they were in his pocket all the time! Oh, you've got somebody in my stead, I see. Well, I'm not jealous; we are too fond of each other for that, aren't we? Come and sing; and we want to arrange about the theatricals."

"She actually cares for that young jackanapes after all!" mused Captain Talbot, as he paced up and down the terrace, while the church bells ceased their ringing for awhile; and through the closed windows of the Castle came the sounds of music and gay laughter. "Heigho! Well, to-morrow will see me far away from here. Oh, how can I bear it? My little love!" He almost uttered the words aloud in his despair and misery, as he turned away from the snowy landscape and dark leaden sky, and sauntered back to the house. As he entered the drawing-room Grace was singing. He almost shuddered as he listened—

"If she be not fair to me,  
What care I how fair she be?"

Christmas-day dawned fair and bright. The dark clouds of the night before had dispersed, and the sun in all his grandeur shone down upon the white earth, scattering diamonds of sparkling brilliancy over all the land—upon the twigs and bare branches of the trees, where the robins sang their hymn of praise, and upon the grass and moss-grown sides of the babbling brook, where the icicles rang a silvery chime with every passing breeze.

Round the breakfast-table at Pentailwn Castle a gay and laughing party were assembled. The post-bag had just been opened, and each person was giving his or her scraps of news for the benefit of the rest. Grace, deep in the mysteries of a wonderful concoction in the shape of a letter, written on two sides of foolscap in a large, round, shaky hand, was alone silent.

"You seem to have something of a task before you, love," said Mrs. Grey's soft voice across the table.

Grace looked up and laughed. "It - from dear old nurse, filled with all the village gossip she can collect. Dear old thing ! she has got her grandson to write it for her ; the spelling is something too wonderful," and Grace laughed again as she returned to her voluminous epistle.

An exclamation from Captain Talbot, who as usual occupied the seat next her, roused her with a start. He held a businesslike-looking letter in his hand, at which he was gazing with eyes full of amazement.

"Bad news, Lionel?" said George Middleton, who had noticed his friend's perturbation.

"No, indeed. I never knew such a thing. You remember my telling you once about that old fellow, the Colonel of the -th, whom I rescued from being run over at one of the reviews?" George nodded. "Well you see, the poor old boy was awfully grateful, always wanting me to go and see him and all that. Then he went out to Australia to see after some property there, and I never heard anything of him since. This letter is from his lawyer telling me of his death and acquainting me with the fact of his having left the whole of his money, some £12,000 a year, together with a fine old estate in Yorkshire, to your humble servant."

"Bravo ! what an old trump ! My dear boy, I congratulate you with all my heart ! I only wish it had been me ; but you always were such a lucky dog !" and the Honourable George Middleton chipped off the top from his second egg with a long-drawn sigh.

Congratulations poured in upon the fortunate heir from all sides. Only Miss Rendlesham held her peace. Lionel had looked at her once; as he told his story, but she was still deep in her correspondence, and took no heed of his movements.

"I suppose you will leave the army now," Sir John said, looking keenly at Lionel.

The latter shook his head. "Not yet. I could not settle down to a lonely bachelor life in my new domain. I must wait awhile, till I am too old for the service," laughing and colouring a little.

"But you will marry, of course—lots of girls will have you, only too glad"—replied his host, laughing, and winking at Grace, who happened to catch his eye.

"In that case, if anybody took pity on me, of course I should retire," Captain Talbot said, as a general move was made from the table.

Miss Rendlesham kept aloof from Lionel

throughout the morning, and not once did he get a chance of speaking to her. She walked demurely to church by the side of her companion, Mrs. Grey, the sweet face looking so innocently pure under the white fur cap. For Grace had donned her polar bear costume, "To be in keeping with the rest of the white world," she had laughingly said. By a skilful manœuvre Captain Talbot managed to secure a seat where he could have a full view of her he loved, "for the last time," he thought ; tomorrow would see him back again at Aldershot, and his newly-acquired property gave him a valid excuse for leaving so soon.

Outside the church porch after service she found Lionel standing, waiting. As she appeared his face lighted up into the smile which gave to it such rare beauty, and it did not leave his face as he turned and walked on by her side. Mrs. Grey was deep in conversation with the Rector's wife, who had been an old schoolfellow of hers, and Grace knew it was no use waiting for her, so she resigned herself to fate, in the shape of a *tête-à-tête* walk with the very man she wished to avoid.

"Do you know, Miss Rendlesham, that you have not yet wished me a happy Christmas?" Captain Talbot said, breaking the silence, and looking down at her with love-lit grey eyes.

"Have I not? Then I wish you one now," she replied, smiling, and colouring under his gaze.

"Do you think wishing alone will give me one?" still looking at her.

"I hope so," rather hesitatingly.

"And yet, Grace, you have it in your power to make my Christmas a *very* happy one. Do you know I am going away tomorrow?" Was it fancy, or did she start as he spoke?

"Why—why need you?" looking at him as though to see if he were in earnest.

"Because I cannot stay any longer near you to see another fill the position which I would have sold my soul for. You know that I love you ; surely that is reason enough for my leaving you, when you still hate me, and love another."

Grace did not answer. There was a smothered sound, which might be either a sob or suppressed laughter, Lionel could not tell which. He was not long left in doubt. Clear as chiming bells came the merry sound, and for some moments Miss Rendlesham enjoyed her mirth unrebuked.

Captain Talbot walked on beside her, his face full of angry vexation. "You need not laugh at me," he said at length ;

"a rejected suitor should be rather an object of pity than of ridicule," bitterly.

"I was not laughing at *you*. I was laughing at the thought of your fancying Joe—" Here she nearly broke forth again.

"My fancying Joe what?"

"That he—cared for me in that way," nervously.

"But you told me so!" in cold surprise.

"Captain Talbot, I did *not*!"

"Then, Grace, if you don't love *him*, don't you think you might try to love *me*?" Coming nearer to her, and bending his handsome head that he might see her face. "My darling, you know now that it is not your money that I want, for I have more than I know what to do with; you know it is your own sweet self."

"Paint and powder, and worldliness and all?" came the question, as two blue eyes were lifted to his.

"Everything!" vehemently. "Grace, will you marry me? Tell me once for all."

They were walking along the same snow-clad fields they had traversed together the day before. In front of them were the Castle servants in their Sunday attire, behind them the rest of the congregation—not a situation for a proposal, certainly, but Lionel Talbot could not wait for a less public place for his final answer.

"I suppose I must, since you are so *very* pressing."

"And you will love me, Grace?"

The girl looked up at the tender grey eyes, at the handsome smiling face, then answered shyly, "Do you know I am afraid I have loved you all along?"

"Now, Grace, how long do you suppose I am going to wait for my lawful rights?" The voice roused Miss Rendlesham from a reverie. She looked very fair and sweet, with a tender love-light in the eyes which were fixed now upon the distant landscape as she stood at the library window of Pentallwn Castle, an open letter in her hand. She did not hear Lionel's footsteps, and as he spoke, and she felt his arms close around her, she started, the bright colour mounting to her cheeks.

"I do not know what you mean, Miss Rendlesham, by treating me like this!" giving her a little shake. "First of all when we came home from church, and I expected to have a nice long talk, you

rushed away to discuss private theatricals, and now all the time since lunch I have not had even a chance of speaking to you. Grace, you are not afraid of me now?" trying to look at the downcast eyes.

"No, I don't think I am," smiling softly.

She felt his arms tighten their hold around her, as he bent his head to the golden curls nearer and nearer, till his lips met hers, this time unrebuked, and both knew that nought could ever come to part them on this earth—that no love could equal theirs.

"And what was my darling cogitating over when I came in? A letter? May I read it?" He took it from her hand. It was a testimonial of thanks from the burnt-out cottagers, and as his eyes fell upon the words of praise for the generosity of his *fiancée*, Captain Talbot clasped the lithe form more closely to him and once more kissed the sweet lips. \*

"So it was my love, after all, who gave that money to those poor people! What could I have been thinking of not to guess it? But, Grace, how about the moustache?" laughing.

"I did it on purpose. I did not want you—I did not want anybody to find it out, but you see they know! It must have been Marin who has betrayed me," laughing rather nervously.

"Grace, I cannot think what made you behave to me as you did, making me think you so different to what you are!" Lionel's tone was reproachful. Grace coloured.

"I don't think I shall tell you any more than you have heard already," she said hesitating.

"You must, I insist," playfully.

"Well, then," hanging her head that he might not see her blushes, "I made a vow (you won't think anything more of me when I tell you) I made a vow," pushing away the lips that seemed about to protest against such a contingency with her soft fingers, "that in spite of my being all you thought me, I would *make you love me!*" She hid her face, covered with confusion. It was soon lifted however, and her eyes forced to meet his.

"And the result?" smiling down at her.

"The result was, I got caught myself," laughing.

"And so endeth GRACE RENDLESHAM'S WHIM," Lionel said, as he kissed the smiling lips.

C. M. D.

# TEA-TABLE TALK.—BY AMY KEN.

## CONTENTS.

Mentone.  
Its Ancient Character.  
The Proud Prince of Monaco.

Buying a Wife.  
The Revolution of 1789.  
Gambling at Monaco.

"**W**E'RE you ever at Mentone, aunt?" asked Helena, who came in breathlessly as the little party was assembling. "Because my husband is not quite sure how it became ceded to France; or what stages it has gone through, and he was so anxious I should inquire from you."

"In the first place, I visited Mentone with some very kind friends quite twenty years ago. Its reputation for health-seekers, or for elderly persons who cannot bear the cold of an English winter, was only then becoming known in this country, and Mentone was rising in importance; but vast improvements have been made since then. At the commencement of the present century the town consisted of little more than a dense cluster of antiquated buildings, covering a conical hill which rises from the sea-shore, the whole hemmed in by defensible walls, with the remains of a castle crowning the summit (since transformed into a cemetery), and a kind of seaport claiming protection from the bastion on the protecting reef. While in this antiquated condition there was no road through it fit for wheeled carriages. The only thoroughfare was the old Roman road, about twelve feet in width, sufficient for foot-passengers or mules. Good reasons for this backward state of things might be found in the political distractions to which the people were subject, and more especially in the fact that the whole of this part of the country was for ages so much beset by predatory bands of Moors or Saracens that it was advantageous to make every place as inaccessible as possible. Villages were placed far up the mountains, with a good outlook to the sea-shore, approachable only by scarcely distinguishable roads."

"But," said Helena, "that is not exactly what I wanted to know. Who were the first conquerors of Mentone, or to whom did the inhabitants pay allegiance in past ages?"

"It is sufficient to go back to the tenth century, I suppose, when feudal lords, similar to those who had power in England, ruled certain districts; and the ruler of the Province of Mentone was named Grimaldi. This feudal lord, clinging to France when assistance was needed to drive back her enemies, was, after the war, raised to the rank of Prince of Monaco, and was likewise invested with the Dukedom of Valentinois in the peerage of France.

Now I must skip over various vicissitudes that the Mentonians passed through, and arrive at the middle of the seventeenth century, when the Principality had the honour of supporting the extravagance of Louis I., a prince who, in his ardent desire to exhibit becoming splendour as an ambassador, accepted a mission to Rome from the Court of France, and his prodigal outlays led to a system of taxation of unexampled severity. The most idiotic of his acts consisted in causing the horses that drew his coach to be shod with silver, each shoe fastened only by a single nail, in order that it might easily be lost and ostentatiously replaced. In Anthony, the son of this madcap, the male line of the Grimaldis terminated. With only daughters to succeed, there arose a grand family consultation how Louise Hypolite, the eldest of these female heirs, should marry some distinguished personage sufficiently rich to discharge certain heavy debts and obligations. In a sense, the girl was put up by auction. It was made generally known that the highest bidder with the longest purse and pedigree might marry her, with or without the young lady's consent, one thing, however, being stipulated, that the husband should sink his own identity, and assume the name and arms of Grimaldi. After much manœuvring Louise Hypolite was assigned to Count de Malignon, whose wealth was pronounced adequate, and his ancestral rank by no means impeachable, and the marriage took place in 1715, and the husband, being proclaimed a Ruling Prince, the bride and bridegroom went to Nice to spend the honeymoon."

"And were miserable ever afterwards," exclaimed Judith, "a fate necessarily following forced unions."

"Ah, you are mistaken for once. Her sister Annette thought as you do, and said on the bridal morning, 'They will never catch me consenting to be bought and sold. I'd die first.' The bride heard it, and whispered, 'He gained my love first, and bought me afterwards. Know you not how fond I have been of taking horse exercise, and would have no other attendant than Alphonse? That was my husband in disguise.' 'Well, when you go amongst your fine French friends I wish you would send me such an attendant,' replied her sister; 'but he must only come on trial.'"

"Did the Mentonians do better under their new sovereign?" asked Helena.

"Not much. The Princess had a large family, and he taxed the people severely to provide them additional funds. To proceed, however, with the history of Mentone, when the Revolution of 1789 broke out in France it spread to this municipality, and so much was Honore III., then on the throne, disliked for his arbitrary measures, that he had to flee for his life, leaving his patrimony to its fate, and this was soon afterwards absorbed into the French Republic. With the fall of the Convention in 1793, and the rise of Bonaparte, the Mentonians experienced a gratifying change, although the conscription was still severe upon them. In the course of Napoleon's marvellous military feats in Italy he visited Mentone, and observing the imperfect character of the old road across the coast, gave orders to his engineers to construct an entirely new carriage-way; the existing Corniche was an engineering exploit which raised Mentone from a mere hamlet to a town in a very short time. After being connected with France for over twenty years the Principality of Monaco was assigned by the Treaty of Vienna to the hereditary head of the Grimaldi family, who, under the title of Honore V., reigned over the Principality. The people soon found themselves in the grasp of the most rapacious tyrant that ever reigned. Honest, industrious, and confiding, they were willing to render loyal obedience to the old family; but, so far from being a sympathising sovereign, he ground every farthing he could out of his subjects, treated them cruelly, even took possession of their mills, and obliged them to buy inferior flour at high prices. Earnest, piteous remonstrances were made to Honore, but they were unheeded. He took a census of their cattle, and made them pay a tax upon every head. He died in 1841, and his son, Florestine I., who succeeded him, was very little better than his father. The ferment of the Revolution in France in 1848 spread to the Principality of Monaco, and, by a unanimous outburst of popular feeling, the authority of the Prince was denounced and rejected. Florestine appealed for help from Sardinia, but in vain; he made some overtures to the people, but they were treated with derision; and he was ordered to quit the territory. Having rid themselves of the Grimaldis, the Communes of Monaco, Roccabruna, and Mentone declared their political independence, in which condition they remained unmolested for twelve years. During this period they did much to restore concord and prosperity; and it was at this time some improvements were effected in the various towns. Florestine died in 1856,

and circumstances then rendered it obvious that the Communes must unite themselves permanently either with Sardinia or France. Matters were at length matured, and in April, 1860, the people were called upon to vote whether they would belong to Sardinia or France, and the choice of the majority fell upon France. Charles III., son of Florestine, protested against the union. At length, in February, 1861, he agreed to a treaty in which he ceded all his rights and privileges over Roccabruna and Mentone for the sum of four million francs, and he was further permitted to have the rights of sovereignty over Monaco, under French protection. Since then Mentone has flourished wonderfully. It is accounted the most healthy spot on the Mediterranean, and physicians gravely assert that by spending the winters here people may live to a hundred years. Here Mr. Spurgeon, the great Nonconformist minister, goes every year. Here Mr. William Chambers, the eminent publisher, who is very advanced in years, passes every winter, and comes back with renewed health; and here the Queen of England passes some portion of the dreary winter, with others of the Royal Family."

"What is considered the season for Mentone?" asked Judith.

"It is said to commence on the 25th of October and to terminate on the 25th of April, when the heat becomes inconvenient. During the winter months frost is never known, as it is sheltered by high rocks from every cutting wind that comes from any quarter but the south, whilst the blue waters of the Mediterranean wash the shores."

"There is one other question I have to ask you," said Helena. "How is it that though France does not permit gambling-houses, yet in Monaco gambling is even licensed?"

"You must remember that the head of the Grimaldis, who calls himself Charles III., is allowed authority over Monaco, and so far as social laws are concerned, he is permitted to make them. The territory only consists of a patch of land extending three-and-a-half miles along the coast by a width at the broadest of one mile; but the gambling licences produce a good revenue, and here fortunes are lost week by week, families ruined, and suicides are numerous. It is sad such things should be. But the resources of the place are so very small that there would be no revenue to support a prince if the gambling-houses were abolished; and thus, to satisfy the greed of a petty sovereign thousands of families are made miserable."

## FAMOUS MEN AND WOMEN.

### PRINCE LEOPOLD, DUKE OF ALBANY.



N April 7th, 1853, Queen Victoria gave birth to her fourth son. Unlike all the other Royal children, the infant was small and weakly. Extraordinary care had to be taken to save his life, and it was feared the little boy would not have a long existence. He had a Scotch foster-mother, who, of course, was selected as the healthiest woman capable of giving the child maternal nursing; and when questioned by friends as to what she thought of the Royal infant, she exclaimed, "I fear he'll never make auld bones;" but his constitution seemed to improve, and when a few months afterwards the Royal christening took place, the child being named Leopold George Duncan Albert, it was said that a more beautiful infant was never seen. His countenance was effeminate, and many visitors would have declared the child was a girl if asked to denominate the sex without previous knowledge. In domestic feelings Royalty differs little from common humanity, and the delicate child had more of its parents' affection than perhaps fell to the lot of others. He was the pet, nursed sometimes on his father's knee, and often caressed by his mother, the Queen. His Royal brothers, who were much older, were dashing boys, ready for a stolen holiday, and when no one could see them, indulging in some boyish freaks such as children of the peasantry would delight in, whether swinging on a gate, slinging stones, or any other recreation which would not be allowable under Royal authority. As their younger brother grew up he delighted himself in books, and when a very infant would ask his Royal father, Prince Albert, questions which were considered precocious, but which were always answered with the sound judgment which ever characterised the Prince Consort. His brothers were always kind to him, but treated him more like a sister, and in sarcasm would call him *little Leo*, and the latter word, of course, meaning *lion*, had a significance which made the appellation rather satirical. He was only eight years of age when the Prince Consort died, yet it would almost seem that the father's mantle had fallen upon this his youngest son. Always from a boy studious, a dear lover of the fine arts, with singular aptitude for accomplishments, such as music and drawing, he grew up more as a student than one who mixed with the fashionable throng, or delighted in sports and pastimes such as his elder brothers participated in. In due course he went to Oxford University, where he studied with a zest that few scions of Royalty were ever known to exercise. Here he matriculated in 1872, when nineteen years of age, and his examination was said

to have been highly creditable; and in 1876 the University conferred on him the honorary degree of D.C.L. Always delicate, an accident at this period, a fall from a window in Osborne, materially affected his health, and brought on a spinal complaint, which gave rise to serious doubts as to his recovery; and on more than one occasion the Queen's anxiety for her youngest son prevented her from taking part in State events which she was expected to attend. On his coming of age in 1874, Prince Leopold was introduced to the Privy Council and accepted as a Prince of Royal descent; in 1875 he was elected a younger brother of the Trinity House; in 1876 he was installed Provincial Grand Master of the Freemasons for Oxfordshire; in 1877 he became a Bencher of Lincoln's Inn; and in 1878 he was elected an Elder Brother of the Trinity House; and perhaps in that capacity did he first manifest his aptitude for business, and convinced those of the fraternity that he had a grasp of mind far beyond what might have been expected from his fragile form. From that time he made himself useful in many ways, presiding over scientific meetings, supporting philanthropic enterprises, but never associating himself with politics or any matters where differences of opinion could arise; thus, whilst he has been making many friends throughout England, he has never made enemies, but whenever the state of his health permitted he was ready to aid in any good cause.

Perhaps the feeling of gratitude to the English nation for the liberal allowance granted him when he came of age may have further influenced his mind in bestowing as much time as was at his command on beneficent objects. When Parliament met in 1874, the proposal of the Queen for an allowance for the fourth and youngest of her sons was part of the Royal Speech, and was proposed by the Duke of Richmond in the House of Lords on July 23, and in the Commons the same day, and carried unanimously, the sum voted being £15,000 annually. Mr. Disraeli, in his remarks in the House of Commons, said: "The delicate state of health of Prince Leopold has prevented him from adopting a profession, which, in the instance of his Royal brothers, has been followed, I may say, by them with energy and success. Partly from that state of health, and in a greater degree probably from difference of temperament, his pursuits are of a different character from those of princes who are called upon to deal with armies and fleets. Prince Leopold is a student, and of no common order. He is predisposed to the

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### PRINCE LEOPOLD, DUKE OF ALBANY.

pursuits of science and learning, and to the cultivation of those fine arts which adorn life and lend lustre to a nation. It would, however, be a great error to suppose that for a young Prince of his character there may not be an eminent career, and one most useful to his country. The influence of an exalted person of fine culture is incalculable upon a community. No more complete and rare example of that truth can be found than in the instance of his illustrious father the Prince Consort. We can now contemplate the public labours of the Prince Consort with something of the candour of posterity. He refined the tastes, he multiplied the enjoyments, and he elevated the moral sense of the great body of the people. Nor has this influence ceased since he departed from us. Public opinion has maintained the impulse it gave to our civilisation, because it sympathised with it. It has maintained in the highest degree that great improvement which he introduced in the manners and the sentiments of the great body of the people. The example of such a father will guide and animate Prince Leopold, and therefore I hope I may make this motion which I have read to the House, in answer to the gracious and confident appeal the Queen has made to the attachment of her faithful Commons."

It is a well-known fact that if Prince Leopold could have chosen a profession for himself it would have been the Church; but as the days have gone by when even monarchy can make a bishop of a youth, it was not considered policy that the Prince should go through all the gradations of deacon, priest, curate, vicar, or rector, then dean, perhaps, until he obtained the lawn, whilst every step would be said to be favoured. He is, however, of a religious turn of mind, without being at all pharisaical. Unlike most Royal princes, his speeches are not made for him: he speaks impromptu and to the purpose whenever he attends a scientific meeting, or whenever he presides at a philanthropic one; and his speeches are worth listening to, because they show depth of thought, and often convey new ideas. It is thus that he appears to be wearing his Royal father's mantle.

But speaking of Prince Leopold's health, it should be stated that, like all the sons of Queen Victoria, he was persuaded to travel, and took several Continental tours previous to his trip to Canada to visit his sister, the Princess Louise, and his brother-in-law, His Excellency the Marquis of Lorne. In this colony the Prince was a great favourite; but a slight accident here necessitated an early return to England, and his health was again impaired. In

the summer of 1881 he was induced to take a trip through Southern Germany, and here he found that specific for all wounds—"love." It was not a fashionable beauty that captivated him, it was not one of those butterflies who are only resplendent in the midday sun, but one like himself, who loved art and science, an accomplished musician, and retiring in her habits, living in an old German Castle, her father reigning in the hearts of the few people over whom he governed, and who were to him more friends than dependants. The power of love seems to have been astonishing, and the delicate frame of Prince Leopold appears to have become more robust since Cupid shot his dart, the mind more vigorous, and health more certain. Surely he may say with Shakespeare—

"Some glory in their birth, some in their skill,  
Some in their wealth, some in their body's force;  
Some in their garments, though new fangled ill;  
Some in their hawks and hounds, some in their horse;

And every humour hath his adjunct pleasure,  
Wherein it finds a joy above the rest:

But these particulars are not my measure;

All these I better in one general best.

Thy love is better than high birth to me,  
Richer than wealth, prouder than garments' cost,  
Of more delight than hawks and horses be;  
And, having thee, of all men's pride I boast."

Like other Royal matches that have been made, this is a pure love-affair—

"Two souls with but a single thought,  
Two hearts that beat as one."

We have only to state that in 1881 Prince Leopold was created a peer of the realm, under the title of the Duke of Albany; and we are assured that whenever the Duke and Duchess appear in England they will be greeted with applause, and the wishes of the nation will be that their happiness will be true and enduring.

With every respect for Royalty, however, we must say when the *Gazette* of January, 1882, announced that Prince Leopold was appointed a Colonel in the army with no regiment attached to the rank, military men thought this was indeed putting a round plug into a square hole. Seeing that His Royal Highness knows so very little about military work, he may as well have been selected as a bishop or President of the Royal Academy, without taking any initiatory steps in either profession.

Princes, like other human beings, are subject to accidents; and in March, 1882, when the Duke of Albany was on a visit to his Royal mother at Mentone, he trod upon a piece of orange peel, slipped, and injured his knee, and it was feared this would necessarily postpone the wedding; but the doctor's skill accomplished a more speedy cure than was anticipated, and in a month afterwards he was a bridegroom.

# A SEA OF TROUBLES

BY G. LYON BURNET,

AUTHOR OF "A FIERY ORDEAL," "ARUNDEL PRIORY," ETC.

## CHAPTER I.



SABEL, Isabel! Look what I have found!" cried Adèle Remington, a fair-haired, blue-eyed girl of thirteen summers.

"It is a ladybird, isn't it? I never saw one before; but I remember the verse that begins—

'Ladybird, ladybird, fly away home.' Is it not pretty?"

"Very pretty, my darling," said Isabel Remington, tenderly stroking the lovely blonde ringlets of her young stepsister Adèle. "But let it fly away. You may hurt it, and it would be cruel to shorten its poor little life."

Adèle watched the tiny insect flutter away, and sat down on the rustic seat beside Miss Remington. These two daughters of the late Squire Remington were enjoying the mid-summer beauty of the woods that surrounded their home.

Isabel, the elder, was a tall, graceful lady of twenty-three, with a pale, delicate face, dark-grey eyes, and light-brown hair, who, since her father's death, three years before, had never discarded her mourning attire. Flowers or jewels she never wore now—the care of her half-sister, Adèle, seemed her only purpose in life. She was one of the greatest heiresses in England, and a daughter of one of its proudest families. A duke had laid his coronet at her feet; she refused it, however, and in vain did her friends remonstrate.

"My father, on his deathbed, left Adèle to my care," she said; "he implored me to be a mother to her. I promised him that I would, and I shall never marry."

Miss L'Estrange, a sister of Isabel's mother, lived at Remington Manor, as chaperon to the young ladies, and was known to both as "Aunt Margaret."

"Why are you so sad to-day, Isabel?" asked Adèle. "I declare you have been crying. Do tell me what is wrong. You look so very pale. Do I try your patience too much in the schoolroom?"

"No, Adèle," answered Isabel, kissing the fair young face; "you never, never tire me. I am most unhappy when we are apart. You know I have always been a little sad since poor papa's death. My teaching you is a labour of love that can never tire me."

"You should employ a governess, or give me a long holiday, Isabel. Teaching must be dreadful work in this hot weather. I know learning is. I cannot understand why you should be so fond of me, Izzie. My mother was not your mother, you know; and,

in books at least, stepsisters always quarrel. Do you remember how poor Cinderella was hated? You have been like a mother to me, although you are only ten years older. I cannot understand why you should love me so much."

"No one could help loving you, my darling; every one loves you. The purpose of my life is to make you happy." And Isabel gently stroked Adèle's long golden curls—the loveliest curls imaginable, so soft, and silken, and lustrous; to finger them caressingly was a custom of hers that had grown with their length. Adèle's face wore a sweet expression of love and gratitude. Young though she was, she could not remain insensible to Isabel's passionate devotion.

"Run away and gather me a bouquet of wild-flowers," said Miss Remington, quickly. "You know my favourites—wood-sorrel and Star of Bethlehem. Be quick, my dear."

Always obedient, Adèle disappeared, and a servant approached, bearing a letter addressed to Miss Remington. There was no postmark on the envelope, and the handwriting of the address had an unmistakable foreign style. Miss Remington took the letter, thanking the servant in a voice that trembled; but she did not at once open it: she seemed frightened to confirm a dread suspicion as to its contents.

"At last!" she murmured. "It has come at last! For days I have felt a nervous shock whenever a letter has been handed to me; but not a doubt remains now. Oh, what a burden of sorrow is mine! But Adèle may return at any moment—let me face the worst before she comes. Poor Adèle! May God help us both!" She hastily opened the envelope, extracted the enclosure—a short note, emblazoned with a gilt monogram—and read:—

*"Remington Arms Hotel, 20th June.*

"MY DEAR MISS REMINGTON,—I reached this dingy little place this morning, and now hasten to apprise you of my projected visit to Remington Manor. I expect to be with you during the afternoon. I wish to rest here for a few hours; my journey having fatigued me excessively. I do trust we shall be good friends. I contrive to make myself at home wherever I go, and I am wearying to see my dear little cousin, Adèle.—Believe me ever to remain, most sincerely yours,

*"CORALIE DE BERANGER."*

"Heaven help me!" cried Isabel, sobbing aloud. "What am I to do—oh, what am I to do?" Again she perused the letter, and, harmless though it may seem to a superficial reader, every word acted like a probe on a burning wound. Hearing the

sound of footsteps, she hastily concealed it, and dried her tears.

"I must face the danger bravely," she thought. "I require all my strength and courage now. It is weak and cowardly to give way to weeping at such a time."

"Good morning, coz," cried a clear and manly voice, and its owner, Sir Henry Charleigh, stood before her.

"The day is too old for such a salutation, Henry," said Isabel, with affected pleasantry. "You should say 'Good afternoon.' What late hours you must keep!"

They were second cousins, and had been playfellows when children. Sir Henry was tall in figure and darkly handsome in face—the picture of health and strength—and gifted with an inexhaustible supply of animal spirits, as his ringing voice and hearty laugh constantly testified. Tropical suns had bronzed his complexion, and the hirsute appendage to his upper lip, by its weighty blackness, invested his features with a certain air of ferocity. Isabel and he were quite friendly, although his suit had been firmly rejected. Perhaps he had not quite despaired of inducing her to alter her decision.

"Isabel!" exclaimed the baronet, at the sight of his cousin's red eyelids. "What on earth has distressed you? Tell me, Izzie, can I comfort you in any way?"

"You cannot comfort me, Henry; no one can."

"Try me, Izzie," said Sir Henry, earnestly. "Give me a chance to prove my devotion to you. There is some secret sorrow that has weighed you down of late. I have observed you looking paler and sadder every day. Share this trouble with me, Izzie."

"I cannot, Henry," said Isabel, sadly. "My burden of sorrow must be borne by myself alone. You could not help me in the least."

"Not as we are, perhaps," continued her lover, with increasing earnestness; "but make me the happiest of living mortals by giving me the right to shield and protect you from every assailing shadow of trouble. Once more let me ask you to be my wife."

"Hush!" silenced Isabel Remington. "Never again must I hear you on this subject. Gladly, oh, so gladly! would I avail myself of your counsel and protection; but to you I must fetter my tongue and deaden my heart. The purpose of my life is fixed as fate. You can never conceive, Henry, how terribly hard it is for me to decline your generous offers to guard me from sorrow."

"Does this mean that you love me,

Isabel?" cried the baronet, his heart bounding with rapture.

"I do love you, Henry," continued his cousin, warmly; "but," she added in cold, passive tones, "I can never be your wife."

"No, no, Isabel!" pleaded her lover. "Why are you so cruel to me? Why do you, in one short sentence, raise my hopes to the highest heaven of joy, and in the same breath dash them suddenly to the uttermost darkness of despair?"

"I do everything for the best," said Isabel, with a sigh. "You must accept my decision as final. Ah," as Adèle appeared, laden with wild-flowers, "thank you, Adèle; this wood-sorrel is exquisite. Here is our cousin come to spend the rest of the day with us—for you must dine with us, Henry: I have particular reasons for wishing it, and Aunt Margaret will be so pleased."

Sir Henry readily accepted Miss Remington's invitation, and Adèle danced with unrestrained glee, the little demoiselle being greatly attached to the baronet.

"I like when you dine with us, Cousin Henry," cried Adèle. "You tell such delightful stories about bears, and lions, and tigers. Is it really their nature to growl and fight, as the hymn-book says? Of course, I know all your stories now, and all your talk about your dogs and horses," she continued, with a *naïveté* that scarcely flattered her listener; "but aunt is so prim, and Izzie is so often sad, that even your company is a relief. I don't care much for dogs and horses; I prefer birds and flowers. Oh, I must gather some flowers for auntie."

"How did you leave Louisa to-day?" asked Isabel, resuming their conversation.

"She is well, and sends her love to you all."

"Thank you. Don't you think Adèle is growing taller now? I believe she has grown more than an inch within the last two months."

"Yes, she is decidedly taller, but still short for her age. Of course, she will soon be sent to school."

"No, Henry; Adèle is not going to school. It was my father's wish that she should be educated at home."

"Then we shall have a foreign governess making her appearance at the Manor?" said Sir Henry. "Some delectable madame, with spectacles on nose, and a command of delightfully broken English. When is she to appear?"

"Again you mistake," said Isabel, quietly. "I don't intend Adèle to have any teacher except myself."

"What! You are going to undertake

to finish the girl's education yourself? For Heaven's sake abandon that idea, and listen to reason. You are wearing yourself away to a shadow. The schoolroom work is already far beyond your strength. Your devotion to your young sister excites the admiration of the whole county; if it is praiseworthy in the extreme; but why let it interfere with other social duties? Your term of mourning expired long ago. Let me beg of you not to live in this seclusion; it injures your health. It is wrong, very wrong."

"Sir Henry Charleigh," said Miss Remington, impatiently, "your counsel is doubtless well meant, but it is at the same time exceedingly inopportune. Allow me to inform you, for the last time, that Adèle's education and my seclusion are subjects in which I permit no interference. Never refer to them in that way again if you wish to remain on friendly terms with me. We must go home immediately. Adèle, Adèle," she cried to her sister, "it is past lunch-time, and aunt will be awaiting us." Adèle rejoined them, and they proceeded towards the Manor.

The preceding conversation afforded Sir Henry ample scope for meditation. Isabel's protracted mourning and seclusion had often puzzled him; but why her determination to continue her arduous schoolroom work, and why, above all, her persistent adherence to celibacy after the confession of her love to him? He marvelled for what her strange, hidden sorrow could be. To him there was a kind of unearthly beauty in her pale face and sad grey eyes.

Remington Manor stood in a fair Devonshire domain, equally rich in timber and luxuriant meadow-land. It was a stately old mansion of great architectural beauty; for many centuries it had been the home of the Remington family, and England knew no prouder name than theirs. It was well known that the Remingtons of Devonshire had, by virtue of their innate pride, repeatedly declined the royal offer of a peerage. The late Squire Remington, however, failed to uphold the hereditary family pride, for after remaining a widower for nearly seven years, he had married the penniless, fair-haired daughter of a retired French officer when past his sixtieth birthday, his daughter, Isabel, being nine years of age at the time. The marriage caused great surprise and regret to his relatives and friends in England; they firmly believed that the old man's dotage had been taken advantage of, and that he had been deliberately entrapped into a *mésalliance*. The second Mrs. Remington never came to England—it was

at Cannes that she had met the wealthy English sexagenarian, who was wintering there for his health. Isabel never saw her beautiful young stepmother ; she, with her Aunt Margaret, had remained at the Manor during her father's lengthy stay on the Continent. She remembered the Squire's return home, when he came accompanied by Joan Dryburgh, an English nurse, who carried a blue-eyed infant girl, at whose birth, he stated, he had become, for the second time, a widower.

The Squire led a strange, melancholy life after his return to the Manor ; his old friends shunned his society, and stood in awe of him ; they could not conceive what had transformed the hearty, hospitable old Squire into a shy, nervous creature, who walked through the sunset of his life like a somnambulist. Some suggested ill-health and the infirmities of age, which others contradicted, as he never required medical attendance ; many believed that grief, either for the loss of his second wife or the folly of his imprudent marriage, had affected his brain ; and a few maintained that the love he bore his younger daughter, Adèle, verged closely on imbecility. He died, leaving Isabel, at twenty years of age, complete mistress of all his wealth, and sole guardian of Adèle.

We will now return to the trio, who had reached the massive stone portico of the Manor, where Miss L'Estrange met them. This lady always accorded a kind welcome to Sir Henry ; a long-cherished wish of her heart was to see her niece Isabel become Lady Charleigh.

"Aunt Margaret," said Isabel, without hesitation, "Henry has kindly consented to dine with us, and I half expect another guest—a lady."

"A lady ! " echoed Miss L'Estrange "Indeed ! Who is it, Isabel ? "

"Her name is Madame de Beranger."

"I never heard the name before. Where did you meet her ? "

"She called here to see papa shortly before his death. I was introduced to her then," answered Miss Remington, in a cold, expressionless voice. "She told me she was a cousin of Adèle's mother. I expect her this afternoon, and I most particularly wish a private interview with her when she arrives. I shall give orders to that effect."

## CHAPTER II.

**I**SABEL REMINGTON sat alone in her library—a charmingly cool apartment, from which the shadows of gigantic elm-trees excluded the hot

June sunshine. The household had generally considered it her private room ; but that it had been transformed into a study and play-room was plainly testified by a confused collection of globes, maps, and school-books, together with wax dolls, wooden dolls, and china dolls, a skipping-rope, and innumerable broken toys—conspicuous among which were Noah, his sons, and his sons' wives, recklessly mixed with the most important pairs of beasts that belonged to the Ark.

Pale and wretched looked Isabel, with disconsolate mien and tear-bedimmed eyes. She might have seen Sir Henry playing with Adèle under the shady elms—she might have heard the child's sweet silvery laughter ring out on the clear summer air ; but her eyes were strained towards the principal entrance of the Manor, and her ears were on the alert for the sound of carriage-wheels. At length a rumbling old luggage-laden fly appeared on the gravelled walk. It stopped at the front door, and a lady alighted. Isabel half staggered nearer the window, and a shudder seemed to shake her frame ; in her eyes was one despairing gleam, that changed into a vacant stare as a stony rigidity stole over her features.

"It is she ! " the young heiress whispered hoarsely, and her hands were clasped in unuttered anguish. Thus she remained for several minutes, as if carved in marble or seized with catalepsy. A soft, respectful knock at the door reanimated her. A card bearing the name of Madame de Beranger was handed to her.

"The lady awaits you in the drawing-room, madam," said the servant.

"Say that I will be with her presently." Then followed a minute of indecision, that was interrupted by a merry peal of laughter from Adèle in the garden. "For Adèle's sake I will be strong and brave," murmured Isabel ; "for her dear sake I will face the danger that threatens us. Oh, my darling, our father, with his last breath, enjoined me to protect your innocent girlhood, and, by the help of Heaven, I will do it."

She cooled her throbbing brow with Cologne water and carefully displaced every trace of tears. Having completely regained her self-possession, she opened an escritoire and took from it a small cheque-book. With a calmness that contrasted strongly with her recent perturbation, she slowly bent her steps towards the drawing-room, and entered without a moment's pause. A sprightly little lady, of the Adelina Patti style of beauty, and dressed in black, rose to greet her.

"Ah, my dear Miss Remington," gushed Madame de Beranger, "I am so charmed to renew our acquaintance!"

Isabel silently and passively submitted to her visitor's ardent embrace.

"You are much changed since I saw you last, my dear," continued Madame. "That was more than three years ago, and your poor father was alive at the time. But you look pale—very pale. Why? Is it that you have been ill? No! I am glad of it. *Ciel!* I feel almost shaken to pieces by that horrid, horrid old cabriolet. You might have sent your carriage for me; but it matters not: I am here, and I am happy. So, my dear Isabel—will you let me call you Isabel?" asked Coralie, in a soft, caressing tone.

"It is a matter of supreme indifference to me, Madame."

"A thousand thanks. Certainly not a very gracious assent, but it will suffice. Do call me Coralie; it is a pretty name, is it not? By the way, my dear Isabel, I saw a love of a child playing on the lawn. Was that my little cousin Adèle?"

"Yes, that was Adèle."

"What a little angel she is! What long golden curls! What lovely blue eyes! How I shall love her! And that gentleman—her companion—who was he?"

"Sir Henry Charleigh, my cousin."

"Knight or baronet?" asked Madame, quickly. "Married or unmarried? Where does he live? Do tell me all about him."

"He is a baronet and unmarried," answered Isabel, coldly. "Charleigh Court is his home, about twenty miles from here."

"Thank you, my dear," said Coralie. "Now I should like to be shown to my apartments. I intend that my toilette shall do both my hostess and myself credit to-night, and not only to-night, but during the whole of my visit here."

"How long do you intend to remain here?" asked Isabel Remington, quietly.

"For an indefinite period, my dear," said Coralie, smiling. "In fact the Manor looks so beautiful that I should like to end my days here in peace. When I visited your poor father I only remained a few hours, and the weather was so dull and foggy—that I carried away a most depressing idea of the place. While I am here it may be as well not to mention that I have been on the stage—you English have such an unaccountable prejudice against it. Understand that. Also, as I explained to you in one of my letters, I wish to be known here as Madame Coralie de Beranger, the widow of a French officer who was killed in the Franco-German war. When do you dine? Six! And I have

only an hour to make my toilette! Will *Monsieur le Baronnet* dine with us?"

"Madame de Beranger," said Isabel, ignoring the widow's last question, "you know that you come here uninvited—you know that your presence here is most unwelcome to me. Understand me at once. I wish you to leave this house to-night, or, at the latest, to-morrow, never to re-enter it. Had my father been alive you would never have dared to come here in this intrusive manner."

"Pardon me, my dear Isabel," said Coralie; "in your father's lifetime I had the misfortune to be hampered by a brute of a husband. Things are changed since then. Now I am a widow—I am free—I may marry again, if I please. Why should I make a secret of my end in view? which is to secure an English husband of rank and wealth, but principally the former. You must give a ball, to begin with."

"A ball!" stammered Isabel, aghast.

"Yes, of course. I must be introduced to the county families. It will be to your interest to further my plans, for at their consummation you will get rid of me."

"It is impossible, Madame, and I must be brief with you. Name your own terms."

An angry light flashed in Coralie's dark eyes as Isabel opened her cheque-book; but she said with quiet deliberation, "Write me a cheque for £250. I must have it. My milliner and jeweller have almost drained my purse."

"My father allowed you £100 a month."

"Do what I tell you," interrupted the widow, angrily. "Let me remind you that you won't gain anything by your cold, freezing manner. It is to your interest to be civil to me. Write me out the cheque or give me *carte blanche*."

"I must beg you to hear me with patience," said Isabel, after writing the cheque. "My father's allowance will be doubled—trebled, if you like—and I will write you a cheque for £5,000 on condition that you leave the place to-morrow, never to return."

"Is that all you have to say?" asked Coralie, contemptuously.

"You must know how very painful your presence here would be to me. Adèle is so keenly observant and precocious; one incautious word from you might entail a world of misery. We live here in the strictest seclusion. I act as Adèle's governess. My aunt and Sir Henry Charleigh assist me in the management of my affairs. You would find life very dull here, do trust you will go. Consider my anxiety; your intercourse with Adèle would be a constant torture to me. Have

some mercy for me, and accept my offer of £5,000."

"Have you finished now?"

"Yes," sighed Isabel, her heart sinking.

"Then hear how I treat your offer of the money you have no use for. I refuse it, and I will make you repent the insinuation that my society would be contamination to Adèle Remington. The blood in my veins is as good as, if not better than, the blood in hers. I intend to remain here; not all the wealth you possess or command can induce me to go. You shall give me what money I require. I must be treated as your guest—your honoured, welcome guest—and as the cousin of your father's wife. Remember that, Isabel Remington; and don't make an iceberg of yourself to me before your relations—don't fall below zero every time you address me. I don't like it, and, what is more, I won't submit to it. Show me the slightest contempt or incivility, and, as I live, I will make you repent it. Accede to my terms and I will not discredit your—well, shall I say your hospitality? Refuse, and I will blast for ever the bloom of Adèle Remington's happy girlhood."

"No, no!" implored Isabel, kneeling. "Spare her, for the love of heaven! You cannot be so merciless. I agree to everything you ask—only spare my darling Adèle!"

"Get up," said Coralie, contemptuously. "This sort of thing is all very well in church. I detest a scene; let me ask you not to repeat it. Once more I must request to be shown to my rooms. Order my boxes to be sent there immediately. I take a long time to dress, as I never encumber myself with a maid."

The dinner-bell rang, and Coralie de Beranger emerged from her dressing-room; her chrysalis-like travelling-dress was now replaced by a gorgeous amber satin robe, trimmed with costly lace and enlivened with glowing pomegranate flowers—a marvellous costume, fresh from the hands of Worth, that shone like burnished gold, and became Madame's brunette style of beauty to perfection. Amber roses were entwined in the jetty coils of her hair with a careless, artistic grace; ornaments of diamonds, bought in the Palais Royal, but glittering with prismatic brilliance that might have defied detection from expert connoisseurs, acted as a crowning stroke to the widow's charming *tout ensemble*.

She tripped lightly down the wide oaken staircase, and Miss Remington, who met

her at the foot, started at the splendour of her visitor's attire. "Does my dress surprise you, my dear Isabel?" asked Madame, with a sweet staccato laugh. "It is Monsieur Worth's latest design, and the lace is a pattern of my own invention. What a delightful foil you are to me with your sombre garments. Ah, I hope to enliven your party!"

Isabel sighed, and they entered the drawing-room. Miss L'Estrange received the French lady in a stately, dignified manner that Coralie inwardly resented. Sir Henry Charleigh was almost struck dumb at the unexpected appearance of so radiant a creature, and suddenly felt very uncomfortable in his morning-coat. Madame frankly held out a little bejewelled hand, and expressed, with charming naïveté, the extreme pleasure she had in making his acquaintance. Her dark eyes brightened as she chattered freely about her tiresome journey from Paris and her rapturous impressions of the Manor.

"It was so kind of Miss Remington to invite me here," she said, trifling with her jewelled, amber satin fan. "I am sure to enjoy my short visit. Never did I see woods or gardens so lovely. More than that, Sir Henry, the friendship of my dear little cousin Adèle is yet in store for me."

Sir Henry spoke in monosyllables, and stared at the Parisian widow in wonder. The lively little lady in her lustrous robe had startled him—the bright, animated features and sparkling black eyes took him by storm. He admired the exquisite arch of her eyebrows, her long, inky eyelashes, her roseate complexion, and white, glistening teeth, even the amber roses contrasting so subtly with her raven hair. If the widow's plan was to fascinate the handsome young baronet, very little effort on her part would suffice. Her ineffable grace of look and gesture alone bewitched him. He hardly observed that the bloom on her cheeks was due to a consummate application of rouge, or that the arch of each faultless eyebrow owed its symmetry to Indian ink. He experienced a strange pleasure in hearing her sweet laugh, and her slightly foreign accent in speaking English.

Dinner passed merrily. The volatile Frenchwoman chattered without intermission, her spirits and vivacity seeming inexhaustible. Later on in the evening, when they returned to the drawing-room, she entranced her listeners with her impassioned singing of French operatic songs.

Miss L'Estrange was nonplussed at Madame's advent. "I hardly know what

to think," mused the worthy lady. "In an Englishwoman her air and manner would be considered bold and intolerable, but in a foreigner I suppose these must be overlooked. Her stay here will doubtless be short, and I don't think I shall regret her departure; but I shall feel grateful if she arouses Isabel from her apathy. My poor brother-in-law's marriage was a very inauspicious affair."

Her thoughts were arrested by the delightful singing of Gounod's "Quand du Chantes." Coralie's voice was sweet and clear as a bell. Sir Henry leant over her to turn the leaves of her music. To have the music before her was simply a stratagem to have the baronet at her side: in everything she sang her memory was note-perfect.

"Thank you, Madame," said Sir Henry. "Mille fois, mille fois, to use your own pretty language."

"Ah, you speak French, Sir Henry?"

"Mais oui, Madame; but I fear my insular accent tortures your exquisitely sensitive Parisian ear."

"Maintenant vous plaisez, Monsieur le Baronnet. Vous parlez à merveille, je vous assure."

"You speak too fast, Madame. The true Parisian accent always seems to run like wildfire. I can never understand it. What a pleasant thing it must be to understand the two languages perfectly! Doubtless your English is admired wherever you go, Madame. Nothing could be prettier than your English."

"Except your compliment, Sir Henry," laughed Coralie. "My father was French and my mother English, and I am quite at home in either language or either country."

"I fear you will find Remington Manor terribly dull after the incessant gaiety of your beautiful Paris."

"Oh, no, Sir Henry," said Coralie: "it is a most delightful change for me. I cannot say how enchanted I was to avail myself of Miss Remington's kind invitation to pay a short visit here, and make the acquaintance of my dear little cousin Adèle, whom I have not yet seen. You never saw my cousin, the late Mrs. Remington, did you, Sir Henry?"

"No, Madame, she never came to England."

"She died when Adèle was born. What a sweet girl she was! They sent to me when she was ill, but, alas! I was too late, and she looked so lovely even in death. I remember the Squire was well-nigh distracted; he had been passionately attached to his poor young wife. Ah, Sir Henry, I know what it is to lose those who

are dear to us! My husband was killed at Sedan by those horrible Germans; but I am proud of his memory: I think it a glorious thing to die for one's country." The widow's bright eyes had softened, and her voice had assumed a tender tone.

"It is very hard to part with those we love," said the baronet, quietly.

"Indeed it is, Sir Henry," continued the widow, sadly. "Yet, why should I repine? I have health and wealth, and above all, the friendship and hospitality of dear Miss Remington—ah, here she is, and *ma chère petite cousine*, Adèle."

Leading Adèle by the hand, Isabel quietly entered the room. Never before had she looked so careworn and wretched; she seemed as if moving about in a painful dream. "Adèle, my darling," she said, softly, "this lady is Madame Beranger; she will tell you that your mamma was her cousin. She has come from France to see you. Tell her you are glad to see her."

Adèle ran impulsively towards Madame and held up her lovely face to be kissed. "I am very pleased to see you here, Madame. If my mamma was your cousin I will love you very much indeed if you will let me."

"Ah, my little angel!" cried Coralie, embracing her. "Love you! I intend to love you more than anybody else in the world. Dear me! You are not going to resemble your poor mamma!"

At this instant Sir Henry apparently found the evening landscape unusually interesting, for it completely engrossed his attention. Had he looked at Isabel he would have seen her face deadly pale, and a strangely contracted expression on her lips, as she tremblingly supported herself at the back of an armchair. Madame, as she repeatedly kissed Adèle, observed the figure of Isabel writhing in agony, and a pitiless look of evil exultation flashed over her features.

"Ah, my little angel Adèle," she continued, regarding Isabel with cruel significance, "you are dearer to me than anybody else in the world; you are a perfect mine of gold to me."

A half-stifled cry for mercy and a heavy fall on the floor followed these words. The baronet turned quickly round from the window; Isabel Remington had fainted. Sir Henry tenderly and anxiously lifted the girl in his strong arms, and placed her on a couch. Restoratives were applied, and Isabel soon recovered consciousness.

"Where am I?" she murmured wearily; "Oh, yes, I remember. Take Adèle away from that woman—I mean take her away to our room—it is bedtime."

Great was the anxiety felt by Sir Henry and Miss L'Estrange ; the former offered to ride off at once for a doctor, but this was firmly declined.

"I was too long in the hot sun to-day, Henry," explained Isabel. "Don't be anxious about me. I am almost well. Aunt Margaret, please take Adèle to her room—it is past her bedtime. Good-night, my darling."

"I am so unhappy about you, Izzie," cried Adèle, piteously.

"You must not grieve, on my account. I am quite recovered. Go with auntie to-night ; I will come soon."

Madame de Beranger, pleading fatigue from the recent journey, begged to be excused. "My dear Miss Remington," she said, with genuine regret in her voice, "I am exceedingly sorry you are ill. Not being strong, you should be careful to protect yourself from the heat of the sun. I do hope you will be better to-morrow. I should be so sorry to cut short my visit here, for I am perfectly charmed with my dear little cousin Adèle. Good-night, my dear. Good-night, Sir Henry, and *au revoir*." The baronet opened the door and Coralie tripped away, trailing her rustling satin skirts with ineffable grace.

Then the cousins were left alone. Sir Henry walked moodily towards the window, where, wrapped in deepest thought, he remained for several minutes.

"When shall we see you again, Henry? Soon, I hope," said Isabel, making an effort to break the unpleasant silence that followed Madame's exit.

"Isabel," abruptly exclaimed Sir Henry, "who is this Madame de Beranger?"

"A cousin of Adèle's mother," stammered Isabel, considerably startled at the unexpected peremptoriness of the question.

"Did you invite her here?"

"She came here to make the acquaintance of Adèle," was the evasive answer.

"Isabel," said Sir Henry, reproachfully, "why should there be this equivocation between us? We have known and trusted each other since we were children ; I have the use of my eyesight ; I cannot help seeing that you believe yourself to be in that Frenchwoman's power."

"Henry," asked Isabel, earnestly, "do not question me to-night. You see I am not strong, and Heaven knows my misery is almost unbearable!"

"Is this woman in any way connected with your misery? Tell me that."

Miss Remington glanced haughtily at her cousin, as she answered coldly : "I am not in a witness-box, Sir Henry Charleigh, and I will not submit to be cross-examined.

I think it most unkind and inconsiderate to torment me in this manner, after I have besought that you may not. You are unable to help me."

"Are you sure of that?"

"I could not be more sure. Oh, Henry, believe me when I say that I would thankfully—oh, so very thankfully—accept your kind offers to comfort me. But they would be valueless. Let me say good-night to you. Come to see us soon again."

"I will. Good-night, Izzie. I do trust you will be better to-morrow." He raised her hand to his lips and left her.

"He is gone," she murmured. "How strange his manner was—so abrupt and confused, as if he could not trust himself to say more! I am glad to be alone—but here is Aunt Margaret again."

"My dear Isabel," said Miss L'Estrange, entering, "are you stronger now?"

"Yes, thank you, aunt."

"I am happy to hear it. I said good-night to Henry on the staircase a minute ago. He seemed exceedingly agitated. I have come from Adèle. The poor child is crying, and cannot go to sleep without you. She says she never once remembers going to sleep without her dear sister Izzie watching over her."

"I cannot go near her to-night," said Isabel, in a low whisper.

"Change your mind, my dear ; if you feel strong enough it will do you good."

"I repeat, aunt, that I cannot see her to night."

"Then she will never sleep, and will insist on coming to you."

Isabel started to her feet. "I must not be alone with Adèle to-night," she cried affrightedly. "Keep us apart, Aunt Margaret, if you love us. I am going to my other room, where no one must disturb me."

"What is this mystery, Isabel? Do tell me why you won't see Adèle."

Isabel sighed wearily, but did not answer.

"Do tell me," pleaded the kind old lady, after a pause.

"Yes, I will tell you."

"What is it, then?"

"You ask me why I will not see Adèle to-night," said Isabel, in a voice of concentrated passion. "Because my unutterable misery has affected my brain—because I fear that, in a fit of madness and despair, I might destroy her life and my own. I cannot see her to-night. The agony I suffer makes me unanswerable for my own actions. I tell you I will not see her. I feel my reason tottering in my maddening wretchedness. I wish to guard her from me—to save myself from crime! Good-night."

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Clad in a light, richly embroidered dressing-gown, Coralie de Beranger sat before a cheval mirror, gently fanning herself, and making a mental retrospect of her first evening at Remington Manor. "Sir Henry is in love with his cousin," thought Coralie; "any one could see that. She returns his love, but will not marry him. Madame L'Estrange wishes the match. I think it would be advisable to send away this Aunt Margaret—she might prove a stumbling-block to my plans. She looked askance at me several times. *Eh, bien!* I can make short work of her if I choose; and I will do it should I see the slightest necessity. How fortunate for me to meet this baronet on the very day of my arrival! 'I will make the most of my charms,' as *Filina* sings in '*Mignon*.' Were I once Lady Charleigh—Lady Charleigh!—the name has a magic sound. For me to be one of the proud, cold, haughty, exclusive English aristocracy—it sounds impossible. Yet, why not? Yes, why not—unless—" The widow paused thoughtfully, and folded her fan. Then a gleam of most determined resolution shone in her dark bright eyes. "I will be Lady Charleigh if I live," she muttered. "Heaven pity those who try to thwart me! My motto is 'Spare not.' I shall be the wife of a baronet! I never yet failed in anything my heart was set on—never once. Ah! *Monsieur le Baronnet*, you admire that pale-faced Niobe—you are ever ready to come here at her call; and I shall take care that she invites you as often as I please. I fear I made a blunder to-day. Was I too harsh? This girl's fainting-fit may arouse suspicion—not that their suspicions would make one iota of difference to me, but in playing a desperate game a little more caution might be advisable." She proceeded to replace her Palais Royal diamonds in their satin and velvet cases. "It was a lucky idea of mine to come here; nowhere in the world could I be safer. In Miss Remington I have a powerful advocate. She will help me; for she would see me Lady Charleigh in order to get rid of me. Everything is in my favour. A very few weeks hence I will be Lady Charleigh." Coralie closed her jewel-box, laughing softly to herself.

### CHAPTER III.

**S**IR HENRY CHARLEIGH was not a courtier. Evenings spent at the balls of a duchess were less congenial to him than hairbreadth escapes at tiger-hunts in Bengal jungles. Marvellous adventures could he relate

concerning the fierce denizens of tropical forests, or the grizzly, ursine occupants of the Rocky Mountains; even the dangerous Nile alligators had suffered from his daring quest of perilous adventure. However, since his succession to the baronetcy at the age of twenty-six, he lived at his ancestral home—Charleigh Court, a picturesque old mansion, situated about twenty miles from Remington Manor—contenting himself with the quieter sports of the hunting field, and a short annual salmon-fishing excursion to Norway. Neither was he a politician. The superintendence of his stables and kennel employed a considerable part of his time; the occasional perusal of the Parliamentary debates on foreign policy, or the *Times* leaders, when of any exceptional interest, more than appeased his political and literary appetite.

With the hunting fraternity of the county he was immensely popular; he sang a good song with admirable spirit, and told his adventurous anecdotes with a point and gusto that always secured for him a host of attentive listeners. In his youth he had learned to love his cousin, the heiress of Remington, with the whole fervour of his passionate nature.

Poor Sir Henry! Well did Isabel Remington know what had made him an exiled wanderer, and had driven him to tiger-hunting. Her persistent refusals to wed him, together with a horribly undefined dread of a rival, had forced him from England. Of course a girl so beautiful had innumerable admirers; her pale, high-bred loveliness of face and exquisite patrician grace of figure would alone have acted as a magnet; but Isabel's enormous wealth rendered her doubly sought after. A slight ray of hope must have kindled in the baronet's heart when, after two years' exile, he returned to find the beautiful young heiress deeply mourning the loss of her father, and still unwed; his prospects brightened when he heard of her repeated refusals to a duke who had humbly begged her to accept his golden strawberry-leaved coronet. All other aspirants for her hand shared the same fate. The county families marvelled at so strange a line of conduct; and romantic novel-reading young ladies verily believed that Miss Remington was, like the heroines of popular sensational stories, secretly married to her groom, or some other unpresentable creature.

The appearance of Madame de Beranger at Remington Manor caused Sir Henry Charleigh considerable uneasiness, for no longer did he doubt that she was in some way connected with the mysterious

consuming trouble under which Isabel well-nigh succumbed. Confident in the pre-science that Madame and he were to be enemies, he racked his lethargic brains concerning the manner in which he should proceed to take up arms against her.

"Good heavens!" he thought. "How useless I feel in an emergency of this kind! To kill tigers in Bengal jungles and shoot bears among the Rocky Mountains seemed the merest child's play compared with what is in store for me. Even poor Hamlet's troubles must have been light, seeing he did not require to do battle with a bewitching little Parisian widow in rouge and amber satin and suspiciously large diamonds."

Dejected and moody he looked as he sat at breakfast; opposite him sat Louisa Charleigh, a fair girl of seventeen, very recently freed from the trammels of a finishing governess.

"What is the matter with you, Harry?" asked Miss Charleigh, as she presided at the breakfast-table. "Your coffee remains untasted. Was there anything wrong at the Manor yesterday?"

"Not much, Louisa," said her brother; "Isabel had a fainting fit, but was completely recovered before I left."

"Poor Isabel!" said Louisa. "I fear she is not strong; but she is one of the most unreasonable girls in the world. Why does she not engage an experienced governess for Adèle instead of slaving in the study as if her bread depended on it? She leads the life of a nun, and is a kind of civilised sphinx."

"Isabel has a visitor at present——"

"A visitor!" cried Louisa in amazement. "At Remington Manor! Tell it not at Charleigh Court; publish it not in the county of Devonshire. Good gracious! Eclipses and earthquakes and comets are as common here as visitors there, excepting ourselves, of course, and I never stayed more than a few hours at a time. Who can be the favoured guest?"

"A French widow — Madame de Beranger by name—a relative, I believe, of Adèle's mother."

His sister assailed him with innumerable questions about Miss Remington's foreign guest, to which he replied with a certain evasion, holding a strict reticence regarding his own doubts and fears.

"Do you expect Monsieur de Raulleau to-day?" asked Miss Charleigh, changing the subject.

"I am not certain; I hope so. But whether he comes or not there is sure to be a letter from him. It is quite time the letters were here."

"Here they are," said Louisa, as the butler entered. "Is there one from Paris? Has the Parisian Pythias written to his Devonshire Damon?"

"Yes," answered the baronet, hastily perusing a foreign-looking epistle. "But it is a very short letter. On account of the death of a brother-artist he will be detained in Paris for several days. His two pictures that were admitted to the Salon have been sold."

"I am very glad of it, Harry; he deserves to succeed."

"He does, indeed," agreed Sir Henry, folding up the letter. "I intend riding over to the Manor this forenoon; but I will be home to dinner."

When alone the baronet tossed aside the *Times* he had taken up, and re-read Emile de Raulleau's letter more carefully this time:—

"MY VERY DEAR CHARLEIGH.—I regret exceedingly that my visit to Charleigh Court must again be deferred by a very unpleasant occurrence. A brother-artist of mine, residing in the same house with me, and with whom I had of late become pretty intimate, was found dead in his bed, poisoned by strichnine, two days ago. Unfortunately, it is not a case of suicide or accidental death, for the poor fellow's wife, a comedy actress at the Théâtre de la Couronne, has disappeared in a most mysterious way. Not the slightest trace of her can be found, which is, of course, terribly suspicious, for it is well known how unhappily they lived. She had money of her own, and acted only for pleasure, and was fearfully extravagant. I will write you again very soon. Adieu, in haste.—Affectionately yours,

"EMILE DE RAULLEAU."

In addition to this there was a one-sentenced postscript, reporting the success of the writer's pictures.

Sir Henry thoughtfully replaced the letter in his pocket. "Emile has a large circle of theatrical acquaintances," he mused, as he lighted a cigarette; "and this Madame de Beranger, judging from her conversation, is well posted up in theatrical affairs. I believe that some time or other this widow has herself been on the stage. Actors and actresses have such an unmistakable style about them that singles them out from the rest of humanity. I wonder if Emile knows her—if they ever met. She is the dark shadow of Isabel's smileless life; could I free her from the bane of her unhappy existence, who knows how sweet my reward might be?"

He ordered his horse to be saddled, and rode five miles to the nearest railway station, whence he despatched the following telegram to Emile de Raulleau, in Paris:—

"If you know anything about a Madame de Beranger, a Parisian widow, or any interesting facts about her antecedents, apprise me at once."

It is a case of the utmost importance. Wire particulars without delay. Yours received to-day."

Time passes but slowly when one is anxiously impatient. For more than an hour Sir Henry strode up and down the platform of the primitive little railway-station, inwardly fretting, and fuming, and hurling unuttered anathemas at the dilatory telegraphic officials—English and foreign. The answer, when it did come, proved a disappointment:—

"I do not know, nor ever knew, any one of the name of Madame de Beranger. Will write you to-night."

"De Beranger must be an assumed name," concluded Sir Henry, as he rode towards Remington Manor. "It is as I half suspected. Good heavens! A woman with a false name living as Isabel Remington's honoured guest at the Manor! There is a mystery, but how am I to fathom it? I never read Miss Braddon or Wilkie Collins, although my sister declares their plots to be unfathomable, and never revealed till the last quarter of the third volume. The mystery is connected in some way with Adèle. Can I forget how Isabel, in a state of returning consciousness, reiterated, 'Take Adèle away from that woman!' Oh, what can be the secret that weighs her down?"

On reaching the Manor, Sir Henry had a short interview with Miss L'Estrange, who, in answer to his kind inquiries, explained that Isabel was quite well, with the exception of a very slight headache, which compelled her to keep her room. Madame de Beranger, still pleading fatigue, was also invisible. Although a holiday had been granted to Adèle, *la petite mademoiselle*, as the baronet playfully dubbed her, wore a saddened look on her lovely face.

"I am so unhappy, Henry," said the girl, as they met on the lawn. "Izzie would not come to see me last night when I sent for her, and I cried myself to sleep. However, she has asked me to forgive her, and of course I have done so."

"Suppose we have a short walk in the woods to-day, Adèle?" proposed Sir Henry.

"Oh, I should like it so much!" cried Adèle, brightening a little, and confidently placing her tiny hands in her companion's muscular eight-and-a-half. "Let us go through the woods to Elm Cottage, where Nurse Dryburgh lives: I will ask the gardener to cut me a bouquet for her—she is very fond of flowers."

This was agreed to, and hand-in-hand they set out. Glorious were the woods in their summer-time verdure of innumerable

shades; the joyous, heaven-tuned carolling of feathered choirs echoed, re-echoed, and lingered in the shadowy foliated aisles, where luxuriant ferns gracefully uncurled their delicate fronds, and sweetest wild-flowers expanded their petals, stealthily caressed by the filtered sunshine that occasionally struggled through the leafy canopy. The baronet and his little companion would have made a fine picture as they wended their way in the twilit woodlands. He, in the prime of early manhood, tall, strong, and handsome: she—ah, never did poet sing nor artist dream of a vision more surpassingly lovely than Adèle Remington, when the golden gates of her flower-like girlhood were ajar.

"Madame de Beranger is dreadfully tired to-day," said Adèle, raising her exquisitely fringed azure eyes. "Mamma was her cousin, you know. Did Isabel tell you? Is Paris really very far away? It does not seem so in my atlas."

"It would take us nearly a day to go there."

"And Cannes, Henry; that is still further away, is it not? Oh, I want so much to go to Cannes. I wouldn't mind if it took me a whole year."

"Why, Adèle?" asked Sir Henry, rather thoughtlessly: he might have guessed the reason.

"Because I was born there," answered the girl; "but not so much for that as for another reason. You know I want to see poor mamma's grave: it is there. I should like to plant forget-me-nots and violets on it. Izzie must take me when I get older. Did you ever see my mamma, Henry?"

"No, my dear; she did not come to England."

"She was very pretty—not like me, though. Her eyes were blue and her hair was light; but in spite of that papa often said that I did not resemble her very much. I do wish she had lived. I often try to think of her as an angel in heaven, with white robes and a harp and crown of gold; but I do wish so very, very much that she had not died," added the girl, sorrowfully.

"Poor Adèle!" said Sir Henry, stooping to kiss the lovely upturned face. "It is very sad. But you know how much we all love you; and Isabel has almost been a mother to you."

"Yes, Izzie could not have been kinder; but she never even saw my mamma—neither did Nurse Dryburgh."

"Tell me about Nurse Dryburgh, Adèle."

"She came to be my nurse at Cannes, about a month after mamma died, and she travelled to England with papa and me;

then she lived several years at the Manor, taking care of me, you know. And when I grew too big to be nursed, Isabel wanted her to become housekeeper at home, but she preferred to go to Elm Cottage. She keeps two cows and a great lot of poultry, and no end of beehives. She must be lonely, but won't admit it. I like her, and she is very fond of me."

"I wonder who couldn't be!" Sir Henry thought.

"Look! There is her cottage in view," cried Adèle, pointing to the little red-tiled, ivy-clad dwelling known as Elm Cottage; which doubtless took its name from the groups of tall, century-old elm-trees that surrounded it. A dark, narrow, winding path led to it, and it stood on the outskirts of Remington Woods, beyond which was an extensive range of undulating pasture-land and rich cornfields. The people on the Remington estates rather shunned the cottage—probably on account of its lonely and gloomy situation.

"I wouldn't live at that Helm Cottage," declared the Manor scullery-maid, recently imported from Peckham Rye; "no, not if you was to offer to make me Queen Victory and Empress of Ingly too. And that walk as leads to it is a perfect chamber of 'orrors at night, with bats and howls, and snakes as makes one feel quite shivery like. I wouldn't live there not for nothink as you could offer me. It's a ghostly 'ole, and that Missus Dryburgh makes it more ghostly than never. I wonder her cows and cocks and 'ens haint died of fright long ago."

It was true that Mrs. Dryburgh was not popular. To all she bore herself civilly and respectfully, but with a certain air of reserve that held people at a distance. She was still under forty years of age; her features were pale and thin, and her hair was prematurely white. That Miss Remington held her in high favour was well known, for the young heiress had openly expressed her regret that Mrs. Dryburgh could not be prevailed upon to accept the post of housekeeper at the Manor.

Joan Dryburgh kept early hours, beginning her work as her cocks were crowing, which generally enabled her to overtake the greater part of her dairy work, and be prepared to enjoy a short rest before her noisy eight-day clock struck the hour of two. Early in the afternoon of the day in question she sat at her little parlour-window, with the monotonous click of the bright knitting-needles playing an inharmonious second to the shrill piping of a pet canary—the gift of Adèle, and how richly prized even the affectionate little

giver never knew. The furniture of the room was clean and orderly to an almost painful degree; every article was microscopically free from dust, and set with a studied mathematical precision.

The tenant of Elm Cottage discontinued her knitting for a few minutes, and sat with her hands idly folded. She sighed—not a sigh of fatigue or exhaustion, but one of pain, betraying the hidden existence of the perilous stuff that weighs upon the heart, of which Macbeth so forcibly expressed himself to his physician. Yes, Joan Dryburgh must have had what the world calls a history; her limbs could not have retained the elasticity of youth, nor could her eyes have remained undimmed, while her hair had assumed a snowy whiteness, without some potent influence.

Abruptly rising from her seat at the window, she unlocked a small cupboard and took from it a flat mahogany case. This case, when opened by a secret spring, revealed the portrait of a blue-eyed, golden-haired girl, apparently about ten or twelve years of age; and its likeness to Adèle was unmistakable. Joan Dryburgh gazed long and fondly at the picture, till her lips quivered and her eyes grew moist with unshed tears. Suddenly she felt two tiny hands cover her eyes, and heard a sweet voice merrily call out—

"Guess who I am."

"Miss Adèle!" cried Mrs. Dryburgh. "How you have startled me, child!"

"Have I, indeed? I am so sorry, nurse; but don't look so frightened. Oh, where in the world has that picture come from? I declare it is very like me. Do let me look at it. Here are some flowers. I have brought Sir Henry Charleigh to see you—I left him near the door." The girl ran out of the room and immediately returned, leading in the baronet. Meanwhile the picture had been shut up and quickly replaced in the cupboard. Mrs. Dryburgh curtsied low at the unprecedented appearance of so august a visitor, and placed a chair at his disposal.

"Thank you, Mrs. Dryburgh. The little lady has often told me how kind you are to her, and I was easily prevailed upon to pay you a visit."

"You do me too much honour, Sir Henry," said the woman, curtsying again.

"Where is the picture, nurse? Do show me it again," cried Adèle, eagerly.

"You will see it the next time you come, my dear. How is Miss Remington today?"

"She has had a headache with being in the heat of the sun, but is almost well. Now,

I do wish to see that picture, nurse. Why did I never see it before?"

"Hush, Adèle. Be a good girl, and I will tell you all about it soon. Sir Henry, might I offer you a glass of cream—I have it cool and fresh?"

"Thanks, Mrs. Dryburgh. I should like it exceedingly."

The hostess spread a cloth of snowy whiteness on the little centre table, on which she laid one plate piled up with tempting-looking cream-cakes, and another bearing a golden wedge of honeycomb. After leaving her visitors for a few minutes, she added two tumblers of cool, delicious cream. Sir Henry and Adèle made a hearty repast, and the former expressed himself delighted with it.

Adèle chattered merrily all the while. "Nurse, did you ever know a Madame de Beranger, a cousin of mamma's?"

"No, my dear. I never heard of her."

"She has come to pay Isabel a short visit. I shall bring her to see you, if she will come. I hope she will stay a long time; she has such beautiful dresses and jewels. Does that canary always sing so loudly, nurse? I wish I had given you a less noisy one. I can change it, if you like." But Nurse Dryburgh preferred keeping the one she had.

Sir Henry, remembering his promise to return to Charleigh Court in time for an early dinner, was obliged to shorten his call at Elm Cottage.

"Good-bye, nurse dear," said Adèle, holding up a rosebud of a mouth to be kissed.

"Give my respects to Miss Remington. Good-bye, my darling," with a kiss. "Your servant, Sir Henry," with a curtsey. From her cottage-door she watched them, with yearning eyes, till they disappeared in the narrow winding pathway.

"Henry," said Adèle, thoughtfully, as they wended their way homeward; "was it not strange that Nurse Dryburgh would not allow me to see that picture again?"

"What was it like, *petite mademoiselle?*"

"Exactly like myself, Henry; that is what surprised me so much. I might have taken it to be a likeness of mamma when she was my own age, or a little younger—but, as I told you before, mamma was not at all like me. The picture looked old, too. It must have been painted many years before I was born."

"I dare say she bought it because it resembled you so much," observed Sir Henry.

"And the dress was so very old-fashioned," continued Adèle. "I have seen a picture of Queen Victoria when she

was a little girl, and she was ~~almost~~ almost the same. Of course she could not have been Queen at that time; she ~~must~~ then have been the Princess Victoria."

#### CHAPTER IV.

EVERY day during the first week of Madame de Beranger's stay at the Manor, Sir Henry was a regular visitor. At an early opportunity he inquired whether or not she knew Monsieur de Raulleau, a Parisian artist; and she admitted, with cool indifference, to having heard the name. The more he studied her the more was he convinced that she might prove a dangerous enemy. He allowed her to flatter him, and submitted to her captivating wiles and snares in so stolid a manner that Coralie deluded herself into the belief of her victim being dumb with admiration, and already so far entangled in her net. The game was slightly in favour of the baronet, for Coralie took no pains to conceal her hand. Her end in view was clear to him as noon-day: he knew that she wanted him to marry her. Without doubt the duel was, to a certain extent, unequal, and to the widow's disadvantage. Her ostentatious display of cleverness was hardly a match for the misleading and cleverly simulated solidity of her adversary.

Coralie was singing a pretty French chanson in her clear, brilliant voice, as she leant back in a richly cushioned pleasure-boat. "Don't be surprised, Sir Henry," she said, breaking off her song, "I often sing when I am happy, and I never felt happier than I do to-day. This is the first time I have been on Remington Lake. I think it was *so* kind of you to ask me to come; you must have known that I would enjoy it."

Sir Henry Charleigh rested on his oars and looked thoughtfully at his companion for a few minutes. If Coralie had never felt happier neither could she have ever looked more bewitching. Her dress was absolute perfection, as only a Parisian's can be; and she wore it with a grace that would have gladdened the heart of Worth, in the Rue de la Paix. It was a soft, white, gossamer-like robe, relieved by tastefully designed trimmings of palest pink satin. The warm sunlight, as it filtered through her pink satin parasol, was infinitely becoming to her complexion; the immaculate six-and-a-quarter gloves, the costly, bejewelled fan, even the tiny bows on her coquettish little high-heeled shoes, were *en suite* with the same delicate shade. A critical observer could easily have

discovered that the satin had been selected to match the pale pink hue of her coral ornaments.

At times her dark bright eyes could be pre-eminently expressive, and they assumed a tenderly softened glance as she repeated gently, "Yes, Sir Henry, I do think it so very good of you to undertake anything for my pleasure."

"I did think you might enjoy a row, Madame," said the baronet, on whose complexion the hot sun and the exertion of rowing combined had produced an uncomfortably rubific effect; "but, to be frank with you, Madame, my desire for your pleasure is quite subservient to my desire to speak with you alone."

"Indeed, Sir Henry!" said Coralie, still more gently, and not quite comprehending his meaning. Her eyes were downcast, and she appeared unmoved; but she felt a delicious thrill of triumph as she thought, "It is coming—I am to be Lady Charleigh!"

Sir Henry rowed the boat to a cool, shadowy retreat, near the brink of the lake, where, shaded by gigantic trees from the intensity of the June sunshine, the water-lilies grew in unrivalled purity on the mirror-like surface of the water.

"What can you possibly have to say to me in private?" murmured Coralie, folding up her parasol and drawing off her pink gloves. "Oh, are these lilies not lovely? I should like to gather a few, but they are never so beautiful as when growing wild; it would almost be cruel to pluck them. Don't you think so, Sir Henry?"

"Yes, they are very pretty. I must tell my friend, Monsieur de Raulleau, when he comes here, to make a picture of Remington Lake."

The widow started—very slightly indeed—but the all-observant baronet noted the circumstance. Coralie looked at him, wasting an arch smile of bewitching sweetness.

"Madame de Beranger," said Sir Henry, coldly, "you have now been a week at Remington Manor, have you not?"

"Yes, it is exactly a week to-day since I arrived; and a most delightful week it has been to me, I assure you. Miss Remington's hospitality and your ever-kind attention have made the Manor a perfect paradise for me," and the widow dipped her white jewelled hand in the cooling water.

"You must have observed the wretched state of Miss Remington's health," proceeded the baronet. "Can you guess what her trouble can be, Madame?"

Coralie's heart sank with disappoint-

ment: the conversation was taking a turn hardly expected by her. "I cannot imagine what her troubles are, Sir Henry," she answered. "Frequently have I observed her depression during the past week; sometimes, even at the risk of being considered curious, I have ventured to inquire the cause of her listlessness; but Miss Remington, although exceedingly kind and good, is very reticent—sometimes very remarkably so."

"I fear your presence at the Manor is not calculated to improve matters," said the baronet, regarding her keenly.

"Now, Sir Henry, whatever you are, don't be enigmatical. I have not the faintest idea of what you mean. I have done everything in my power to arouse Miss Remington from her apathy; I have proposed a houseful of guests—a ball—also private theatricals. She looked a picture of horror at the very mention of theatricals: her distaste for them is very unfortunate. How interesting it might have been to prepare a few scenes of the 'Sphinx' of Octave Feuillet. Isabel would have played *Blanche de Chelles* to the life. I once played *Gabrielle Lajardie*—at an amateur performance, of course—and my impersonation was very much praised. Perhaps, with your valuable co-operation, I might succeed in inducing her to overcome her almost insuperable objections."

"It is very apparent that Miss Remington is unfit, at present, for entertaining visitors."

"Indeed! Then what would you propose for Isabel?" asked the widow, betraying a feeling of irritation, and purposely talking of Miss Remington by her Christian name, because she observed that it annoyed him.

"Only one thing, Madame, which is that you leave Remington Manor at once."

"Leave Remington Manor!" echoed Coralie, in surprise; "and when my dear Isabel is unwell! That would be unkind and ungrateful on my part. No, Sir Henry, I cannot do that."

"How long do you intend to remain here?"

"That, Sir Henry, is a question which only concerns Isabel Remington and myself. You surprise me by asking it." Coralie felt her temper beginning to rise at this dangerous turn of their conversation. "Why should I leave Remington Manor?"

"Because you are Miss Remington's trouble."

"I? Did she tell you that?" cried Coralie, her dark eyes flashing angrily.

"No one told me," said Sir Henry, quietly. "I can see that your companion-

ship is odious to Miss Remington; I can see you have the means of playing on her fears—of terrifying and torturing her. I believe that she is in your power."

"In my power?" cried Coralie, laughing gaily. "In the power of a poor little inoffensive woman like me? Don't be preposterous, Sir Henry. Isabel and I are the best friends imaginable. I declare, there is my dear little cousin Adèle on the bank! Do let me land, Sir Henry—I am sure you will enjoy your row better without me. Adèle! Adèle!" she cried, "wait a minute for me; I wish to walk home with you." She dried her hand with a small lace handkerchief, and the baronet, as requested, pulled the boat to the edge of the lake, where little Adèle, flower-laden and fairy-like, awaited them.

"Please take me for a row, Henry," cried Adèle; "I should like it so much. I have been playing with some village children in the woods, and they are so stupid. Do take me for a row."

"Not to-day, my dear," said Sir Henry, as he handed Madame out of the boat; "Madame de Beranger wishes you to walk home with her."

"But I don't want to walk with Madame de Beranger," said Adèle, petulantly, as she threw away her wild-flowers. "I would rather go with you. My head aches, and a row would cure it. I don't like Madame; she annoys my sister Izzie and makes her ill. I heard Aunt Margaret say that she believed Madame to be a wicked woman, and hoped she would leave us very soon."

Sir Henry felt that Adèle had made an unlucky speech, for the scowl that, for a moment, flitted over the Frenchwoman's features was malignant in the extreme. "As your head aches, perhaps Madame de Beranger will kindly excuse you, Adèle," he said.

"Certainly," said Coralie, pleasantly, "*au revoir.*"

Adèle jumped into the boat, and Madame, after acknowledging the baronet's salutation with a mockingly polite *réverence*, bent her steps towards the Manor.

"So, *Monsieur le Barguinet*," muttered Coralie, vindictively, "so we are not even to be friends after all! You have laid down the gauntlet, but we shall see who is to win. Leave Remington Manor, indeed! *Mon Dieu, mais non!* I am not a favourite here. I believe every one of them dislikes me. Have I been too incautious? It is unfortunate that my temper will get the better of me. After all, it might be as well to leave the Manor. It might be more diplomatic to screw ten thousand pounds out of this pale-faced heiress and leave—

especially if there is any probability of that Parisian landscape painter turning up here. That might be awkward for me, but doubly so for *him*. 'Spare not' is my motto, and why should I except him? I shall remain here." The widow stopped short in her walk, as if brooding deeply. The prospect of her becoming Lady Charleigh was, for the present at least, miserably shattered, and a more wary line of conduct must be entered on. That the inmates of the Manor were her enemies she no longer doubted; but the unrestrained power she exercised over the young heiress rendered her reckless of all consequences, and made her feel their likes or dislikes a matter of supreme indifference. It is always easier to make enemies than friends, but Coralie's extraordinary versatility made either with little or no effort. She had continually at command an inexhaustible supply of stinging invective, and could always assume a charmingly winning manner that was invariably irresistible.

"Good afternoon, Madame," said Miss L'Estrange, as she met the widow in a shady avenue.

"*Ciel!* How you have startled me, Miss L'Estrange! Sir Henry and Adèle have just gone for a row. The heat has fatigued me, and I shall have a short nap before dinner."

"I am very pleased to meet you alone, Madame," said the elder lady, who spoke frigidly, and wore an exceedingly anxious look on her thin, refined features.

"I am all attention," said the widow, with a resigned air. "What is it?"

"I hope you will not deem me rude, Madame," proceeded Miss L'Estrange, with hesitation. "I am only speaking in the interests of my dear niece, Miss Remington. In her efforts to be hospitable she neglects her health. As her medical attendant orders perfect rest, perhaps you will kindly understand that it is exclusively in my anxiety for my dear Isabel's welfare that I venture to ask to what length your visit here may extend."

"Is that all?" asked Coralie, impatiently.

"Not quite, Madame; my niece is not aware that I have taken this liberty of speaking to you; I believe she would resent my interference in a matter like this. Do not be offended; I only considered it my duty. In the event of Miss Remington regaining her usual health and strength, I am sure she would gladly have a renewal of your visit."

"Have you done now?" demanded the widow, with a sneer.

"Yes, Madame; I have no more to say."

"Then my answer is that I can only accept my dismissal from my dear Isabel herself."

"It is as I have suspected," remarked Miss L'Estrange, disdainfully. "You have some mysterious influence over my niece."

"What you suspect is not of the slightest consequence to me. Your affected anxiety for Isabel Remington's welfare is only a varnish to your wish to get me out of the house."

"Pray don't be insolent, Madame," said Isabel's aunt, haughtily. "Please remember that I, at least, am a lady."

"Do you imply that I am not?" cried Coralie, angrily, her temper ready to blaze up at the least provocation.

"If you speak to me in that tone I decline to answer you," and Miss L'Estrange walked proudly away.

A derisive laugh emanated from the Frenchwoman's lips—a dangerous, revengeful laugh, that foreboded a cruel use of the power she possessed. Accelerating her steps every minute, and working herself into the highest pitch of fury, Coralie proceeded towards the Manor. "I will make them suffer for their slights upon me," she muttered between her clenched teeth, "both that love-sick clod of a baronet and this stuck-up piece of old-maidism. She wants me out of the house, too! Eh bien! We shall see who is to go first."

Bent on immediate revenge, Coralie went straight to her own rooms, and rang the bell, which was answered by a maid who had express orders to wait on Madame if required. "Show me the way to Miss L'Estrange's apartments, Merton," commanded the widow.

"Yes, ma'am; this way, ma'am," assented the girl, very readily. Merton was a clever young person, with smart caps, bright ribbons, and an eye to the future; already she had made innumerable calculations on what were likely to be the first cast-off articles of Madame's wardrobe.

"She must be liberal," thought the astute Merton; "she hasn't a hartle as isn't fresh from her milliner—not even 'er ribbott's and laces; and all 'er rig-out is new. Oh, if she'd only leave me that pink parasol with the lace on the top! To go to chapel under it would be something delightful."

Miss L'Estrange's suite of apartments overlooked the Manor gardens. "I think I like these rooms better than any in the house," said Coralie, surveying them. "The boudoir, bedroom, and dressing-room are delightful. Are they not, Merton?"

"Yes, ma'am; and Miss L'Estrange 'as

'ad 'em ever since our young missus was a child in harms."

"Well, Merton, I think they will suit me much better than those I occupy at present, so I wish you to remove Miss L'Estrange's wardrobe and dressing-case—in fact, all her belongings—and bring mine here."

"Oh, lor, ma'am! It can't be done," cried Merton, her eyes roundly opening in wonder to an abnormal extent. "It's more than my place is worth. I am very sorry, ma'am; I'll go as far to oblige you as flesh and blood can, but what you ask can't be done."

"Oh, yes, Merton, it can," said Coralie, smiling.

"It can't, ma'am, and there's an end to it," repeated the girl, emphatically. "It 'ud be a month's wages and go for me, and I'm a norphan with nothink except my carkarter."

Coralie de Beranger was a diplomatist. To have a bribe rejected would be intensely humiliating; she was not going to incur such a commonplace risk as that. No; to gain her own ends the wily Parisian widow had other resources in reserve. "Don't stand staring at me in that way," she said severely. "You know Miss Remington bade you do all that I required. I met Miss L'Estrange in the avenue a few minutes ago, and we arranged the matter about changing rooms. We both wish it done promptly."

"Oh, ma'am, I beg your pardon," humbly apologised Merton, to whom the parasol seemed very dim and indistinct in the background of her mind's eye.

"How could I possibly ask such a thing without Miss L'Estrange's permission?" said the specious Coralie. "Don't waste time, but get your fellow-servants to help you. I shall really be obliged if you hurry, and I promise that you shall not regret obliging me."

Merton hurried away at once; the last sentence had suddenly jerked the visionary pink parasol from its almost hopelessly indistinct background to a preternaturally distinct foreground in the perspective of her eager imagination. The result was that in less than an hour Coralie found herself comfortably installed in her new quarters. Radiant in her coral jewellery and roseate embroidery, she gracefully reclined on a luxurious ottoman, leisurely giving her attention to a fragment of guipure, and not evincing a single trace of her recent anger. To avoid occasional bursts of wrath was beyond her nature, but to indulge in persistent bad temper was a line of conduct she rejected on principle. Continued fits of ill-nature bred crows'-feet

and wrinkles, at the very thought of whose inevitable acquaintance Coralie shuddered. She had laid the train to a domestic broil —had applied to it an ignited match ; and, to all appearance at least, awaited the explosion with the happy light-heartedness usual to a girl of seventeen when dressing for a first ball.

Coralie looked up with a smile when Miss L'Estrange entered the room in high displeasure. "I am at a loss, Madame, how to account for this unseemly intrusion," began the English lady, haughtily.

"Pray, don't consider it an intrusion, my dear Miss L'Estrange," said Coralie, sweetly. "I like the view so much, and I knew you would not deny me so small a pleasure. The gardens are lovely, and the perfume of the roses delicious. I feel quite happy here."

"I consider your presence here the most unwarrantable intrusion I ever conceived."

"I am very sorry you think so," interrupted Madame, having pre-determined to be pleasant. "Much as I regret it, I cannot help your regarding it in that light. How do you like this guipure work ? Oh, I detest your English abominations in crochet and tatting."

"Miss Remington shall be apprised of your conduct, Madame."

"Oh, yes, thanks. Do tell Isabel. I hardly thought it necessary to inform her that I preferred this view of the gardens. I knew she would not object ; the dear girl has always proved herself so desirous of promoting my comfort. Thank you, Miss L'Estrange, for kindly undertaking the office of apprising Isabel," concluded the widow, with her sweetest smile.

Burning with indignation and resentment Miss L'Estrange left the boudoir, and returned in a few minutes accompanied by Miss Remington. Poor Isabel looked even paler and more wretched than usual. She went quickly towards the widow and said imploringly, "Madame de Beranger, I beg that you will not affront my aunt, Miss L'Estrange."

"Affront ! " repeated Coralie, in surprise. "Ciel ! I never dreamt of such a thing ; I would not affront your dear, kind old relative for the world."

"Do consider how your conduct must outrage her feelings, and spare her and me."

"People destitute of feeling themselves generally regard others as equally so," interposed Miss L'Estrange, icily.

"My dear Isabel," said Coralie, affectionately, "poor relations are such dreadful encumbrances and really ought to be

kept in their proper places. I am teaching you a lesson for which you will yet thank me. How do you like this guipure, Isabel ? I fear I shall find the petals of these blucts rather difficult," and Coralie calmly proceeded with the cobweb-like stitches of her lace.

"Do listen to me, Madame," pleaded Isabel. "You must know that you cannot have these rooms ; they have been my aunt's ever since I can remember. You must leave them."

"And the Manor too," added Miss L'Estrange.

"Indeed, Miss L'Estrange," sneered Coralie, the temptation for invective becoming irresistible, "I never consider the wishes of poor relations ; they become insufferable when they presume. Old maids and poor relations are my pet aversions. I declare it would take the cunning of a spider to connect these meshes."

"Oh, Madame, spare me !" cried Isabel, wringing her hands. "Why make such a cruel use of your power ? I implore you not to insult my aunt. She has been more than a mother to me. Do show some mercy."

"Miss L'Estrange was the first to declare war between us," said Coralie, suddenly forgetting her resolve to be agreeable. "She laid down the gauntlet by poisoning little Adèle's mind against me. Let her fight the battle as she pleases ; I decline further intercourse with her."

"Well, Isabel, which of us is to leave this house—she or I ?" demanded Miss L'Estrange.

A pause. Madame was deeply engrossed with the intricate stitches of her work. "I fear it must be you, Aunt Margaret," said Isabel, with a sigh and an agony of despair in her voice.

"Then, Isabel Remington," said Aunt Margaret, "I consider you guilty of the blackest ingratitude. God knows what this woman's hidden influence over you may be, but may He protect you if you are obliged to associate with so bold and so unprincipled an adventuress !" Miss L'Estrange left the room with stately steps, and prepared to leave the Manor. Madame de Beranger diligently continued her lacework with unruffled serenity.

Isabel Remington rushed to her room, and indulged in a frantic outburst of grief. She flung herself on a couch in a storm of tears and a tempest of sobs. "O God," she cried wildly and passionately, "it will kill me ! The dearest friend I have in the world to be outraged and insulted, and I powerless to protect her—my own mother's sister to be driven out of my house by this

*horrible woman ! Oh, it will kill me—it will kill me !*

## CHAPTER V.

**E**MILE DE RAULLEAU was an ambitious young French landscape painter of twenty-eight, who toiled at his easel from morn till noon, and noon till early in the evening—of course, with frequent intervals. Not for wealth did he toil, but with the ambition to reach that terribly un-get-at-able station at which so very few are destined to alight—Fame. Several years ago he had been Sir Henry Charleigh's *fidus Achates*, and, strange to relate, their bond of friendship had never slackened, notwithstanding the lapse of time and their extraordinary dissimilarity of tastes and pursuits. The physical contrast between the two friends was remarkable, Emile being singularly effeminate in appearance. His figure was slight and graceful, his feet conspicuously small, and his constant care was that the winds of heaven might not visit too roughly his girlish hands and complexion. Raulleau's friendship for Sir Henry was more sincere than might have been expected from his light, frivolous nature; his visit to the Court was daily, almost hourly expected, and the Baronet's impatience became excessive.

"I do wish the fellow would turn up," muttered the master of Charleigh Court, discontentedly, as he lounged in his smoking-room, perfuming it with a choice cigar, and stroking his heavy moustache. "I am dying to hear something about this Beranger woman. I saw her start when I mentioned Emile's projected visit. I am certain of it. He must know something of this *ci-devant* actress. Actress ! Good Heavens !" The cigar fell from his nerveless fingers—his bronzed complexion paled, and he started to his feet—a ghastly suspicion had crossed his mind. "If this woman should be the runaway poisoner from Paris ! Oh, no, the thought is too horrible ! A murderer living in the bosom of the Remington family ! It is impossible !"

Still the suspicion haunted him with most unwelcome pertinacity. If it were true, for one reason it would not be quite so appalling. However far in the French woman's power Miss Remington might be, his discovery must be the means of driving her from the Manor.

"Why does Emile not come?" he repeated. "I can't telegraph—I don't know his address in London—and he must be

there now. Why the deuce does he not turn up ?"

Hardly had he uttered to himself that irrepressible interrogation than the delinquent, in the shape of the young Parisian artist, appeared, as if by Mephisto invocation. The Baronet warmly welcomed his friend, who began an explanatory speech regarding his detention in London.

"Excuse me interrupting you, my dear Emile," said Sir Henry. "I am dying to ask you a hundred questions. Afterwards you will know why. What is the name of the actress who has murdered her husband in Paris ?"

"Angélique Delarne," answered Emile.

"Why do you ask ?"

"Is she little ? is she dark ? does she speak English ?"

"To each question I reply *oui, oui, oui*. La Delarne's little figure is perfection—her brunette beauty is perfection—to perfection speaks she your difficult language—she commits a grand crime to perfection ; and to perfection escapes she the detectives."

"Has any trace of her been found ?" asked the Baronet.

"Only to London—she has been tracked there, *mon ami*, but no farther ; she has eluded detection most cleverly. Latterly she and her husband led what, in English, I believe, you call a cat-and-dog life. Do you know anything about her, *mon Charleigh* ?"

"I have very serious reasons for questioning you, Emile. Subsequently I will explain everything. Can you tell me anything about this ?" asked Sir Henry, producing a small lace handkerchief which was found in the boat after he rowed with Madame de Beranger on Remington Lake. On the lace, delicately stitched with white satin, were the words—"La Sorcière aux Beaux Yeux."

"Grand Dieu !" ejaculated the Frenchman, quite astounded. "It must be hers ! Where did you get it ? Is she here ? 'La Sorcière aux Beaux Yeux' was the name of an operetta in which she created a *furore* at the Théâtre de la Couronne. She went by the name ever since. Tell me quickly if you know anything about her."

"I will by-and-by, Emile. She is not here, and will not be here. As you look very tired after your journey you had better retire to your rooms for an hour or two to refresh yourself. My valet will wait on you, and let you have anything you wish. Do excuse me, my dear fellow. I have very important business on hand. We dine at six; it is now half-past two. Unfortunately my sister is out at present, but will

be home before dinner. I trust you will forgive me."

"*Mais certainement,*" assented Emile, with that ever-ready politeness peculiar to his nation. "But, *mon Dieu*, how ill you look! Have you had bad news? No! Well, I must not detain you; let me be shown to my rooms, I do require to rest."

Sir Henry Charleigh galloped towards Remington Manor with a tempest of conflicting emotions raging within his breast. Hope predominated—the joyful hope of releasing Isabel Remington from a sea of troubles, and winning her for his wife; but fear was strong, and waxed stronger with every milestone he passed, till his task—that of proscribing the woman who called herself Coralie de Beranger from Remington Manor—assumed a horror that was formidable in the extreme. Might not the Frenchwoman, in baffled rage, have the power to take a cruel revenge and aggravate the sufferings of the girl he loved?

The first news he heard at the Manor was that Miss L'Estrange had left, and that Adèle was laid up with a mild attack of scarlet fever, which she was believed to have caught when playing with some village children some days before. He asked to see Miss Remington, but was denied an interview until he had pressingly repeated his request.

Isabel Remington entered the library, where he awaited her, pale and calm—with the calmness of utter despair. "I hope you will be brief, Henry," said Isabel, "I am required in the sick-room. What do you want with me? Adèle is very ill, but not seriously. The doctor has cut off her beautiful curls. Oh, it is very sad!"

"I am very sorry for you, Isabel."

"I believe you, Henry, but what is the very important business that made you insist on seeing me? Excuse me being abrupt. Mrs. Dryburgh is with Adèle, and requires my assistance."

"It is this, Isabel," said Sir Henry, speaking with clear emphasis—"I have the power to rid you of the woman who calls herself Madame de Beranger. Certain circumstances have come to my knowledge to-day that are sufficient to drive her from you for ever! For the present, at least, I will spare you the painful details."

"It is useless, Henry—quite impossible."

"But I know that I should succeed," he persisted, with firmest conviction; "and if I do I have a reward to claim."

"What is that?"

"That you will repay my devotion and be my wife."

"Oh, Henry, to yield myself to your love

and protection would be happiness unutterable! God alone knows what I suffer, or how my troubles will end. If you could—"

"Yes, my dear Izzie, if I could—"

"If you could free me from that woman's accursed power," cried Isabel Remington, passionately; "if you could save me from her dangerous influence—shield me, and one who is dearer to me than life itself, from her hateful presence, I will be your wife. I promise you."

"God bless you, Izzie! There is happiness in store for us both. 'When night is darkest dawn is nearest,' as the song goes. Send Madame de Beranger to me—I have something to say to her."

"Yes, Henry," said Isabel, trembling with hope and fear; "but remember, if you make the attempt and fail, you will double the weight of my already too heavy burden. She has driven Aunt Margaret away from my house."

"Fear not, my darling," he said fondly. "I will win the battle for you, no matter what her inexplicable influence may be, and your Aunt Margaret will return soon. Say to Madame that I wish to consult her here."

Hardly had he been left alone a minute when the rustling of silken garments was heard outside the library. "Good morning," said Coralie, entering, and saluting him with a mockingly low curtsey, which he acknowledged by an almost imperceptible inclination of the head. As usual, she was faultlessly attired, and on this occasion in glowing, wine-coloured silk, richly trimmed with Mechlin lace. She unfolded her fan, and added, with a bright smile, "You wished to see me, Sir Henry. All the honour is mine."

Sir Henry shuddered to think that this guilty wretch should live in the same house with Isabel Remington, and the thought acted on him as a keen incentive. Coralie sat down on a low ottoman in the embrasure of an oriel window and gently fanned herself. "There is to be war between us," she thought. "Eh bien! We shall see who is to be victorious," and she looked up in her companion's face with a most bewitching smile of expectation.

"Madame de Beranger," began Sir Henry, with quiet resolution—"I believe you prefer being called by that name here?"

"I do, Sir Henry. Don't you think it is a pretty name?"

"Yes, it is prettier than Angélique Delarne, '*La Sorcière aux Beaux Yeux*' of the Théâtre de la Couronne of Paris."

The first shot struck home. A ghastly pallor seized the woman's face that was

trebly painful to look at under the rouge on her cheeks. She hid her features in the shadow of her large purple fan, and regained her self-possession in a marvellous manner. "Really, Sir Henry," she simpered, playfully remonstrating, "I do not wish to offend you, but I must beg you to explain in English why you sought this interview with me to-day, for your French accent, although undoubtedly pleasing, is unfortunately most unintelligibly insular."

"Prevarication will not avail you much, Madame," said Sir Henry, severely. "I wish to be merciful to you, but at the same time I must be brief and to the point. I have a short story to tell you—so short as not to overtax your patience. Ten days ago a Parisian artist, byname Alphonse Delarne, was found poisoned in his house, and on the same day his wife, an actress at the Crown Theatre—as you prefer it in English—disappeared. A suspicious circumstance—was it not, Madame?"

Coralie assented with affected indifference and quickened her fanning.

"The man must have been dead twenty-four hours before he was discovered locked in his room, therefore the criminal had a good start of the police. The missing wife—or, rather widow—was traced to London, but no farther. Three days after the murder a lady calling herself Madame de Beranger arrived here. Do you understand me now?"

"Not quite, Sir Henry," said Madame, with scarcely a perceptible quiver in her voice. "I read the story in the papers. I don't think the names were given. Why should you inflict it on me?"

"What nerves of iron she must have!" thought the baronet. He said aloud, "Because you are Angélique Delarne."

"It's a lie!" cried Madame, furiously, stung into passion by her accuser's cold, measured tones. "Where are your proofs?"

"This handkerchief that you left in the boat yesterday," he answered, showing the flimsy square of lace. "It bears, sewed in satin, 'The Witch with the Beautiful Eyes'—as you prefer it translated. I may add that at present I have a guest in my house—a Monsieur de Rauljeau, from Paris, who resided near Monsieur and Madame Delarne. Is my explanation sufficiently lucid now?"

Coralie's dark eyes literally blazed with rage and defeat as she demanded, "Supposing your absurd story to be true, what do you intend to do?"

"The criminal shall have a chance of escape on condition that she leaves this house within one hour."

"And what if the suspected person refuses?" asked Coralie, boldly.

"I shall give information to the detectives' headquarters and the law must take its course. Very reluctantly shall I do so, for I fain would spare Miss Remington's feelings. The suspected person will not refuse so small a chance of escape, for it is small indeed. A dozen Parisian detectives are in London; the principal trains and passenger vessels are watched. It is a perfect miracle that the fugitive has not yet been found."

The angry light died out of the woman's eyes, and the deadly hue returned to her face. She trembled, and the dreadful sense of danger seemed to stun her. Nowhere could she be safer than buried in the seclusion of Remington Manor; to leave it would simply be madness: a desperate resistance was her sole chance of safety.

"Have you decided what to do?" asked Sir Henry.

"I?" said the widow, raising her arched eyebrows in well-simulated surprise. "I intend to remain here, if that is what you wish to know."

"Then may Heaven have mercy on you!"

"Don't pity me!" cried Coralie, angrily. If there is one thing on earth I hate more than another it is to be pitied. Reserve your pity for your pale-faced Isabel Remington. Dare to threaten one word more of law or detectives to me and I will deal her a blow that will blast her happiness for ever. Still, she is some protection to me now. Would you like to know why, Sir Henry? Because she will not allow you to turn me out of her house. She will go down on her knees and implore you to leave me unmolested. You love her and you will obey her."

"Then you defy me!" exclaimed Sir Henry, astounded at this unexpected resistance.

"I do defy you!" retorted the Frenchwoman, recklessly. "'Qui ne risque rien n'a rien,' is a favourite motto of mine, my dear Sir Henry Charleigh, which, when reduced to the level of your miserably commonplace 'calibre' and the only language you understand, means 'Nothing venture, nothing have.' I dare say you have heard it in the stable parlance with which you are so thoroughly acquainted. But I digress. It is my turn to tell a story—a very pretty little story, *Monsieur le Baronnet*—a story," she cried passionately, "of Adèle Remington's mother."

"Hush, for God's sake!" burst forth Sir Henry. "The whole house will hear you at that pitch."

The woman's last words arrested the attention of some one passing the library-door, and a figure stealthily glided into the room, unobserved by its occupants, and hid behind a large draught screen.

"I dare say," continued the widow, "you think that Squire Remington's wife lies buried at Cannes. But it is false. Adèle Remington's mother is a raving maniac in a Parisian madhouse."

"Merciful heavens! This is the mystery," groaned the baronet.

"Hereditary insanity of a most virulent nature was in the family," proceeded Madame, fiercely. "Mrs. Remington's mother and grandmother died in the same madhouse. Can you now understand my power over this proud English heiress? I am the only one that knows the secret, and the late Squire paid me handsomely for my silence and service."

"It will no longer be a secret; Miss Remington will submit to your tyranny no more."

"You overlook one thing, Sir Henry," hissed the Frenchwoman: "you forget Adèle Remington and the delightful inheritance she is heiress to. Isabel Remington would part with her heart's blood before she would let Adèle know of her mother's madness. The child is sensitive to a painful degree, and the knowledge would prey on her mind till, in a few months, she would become imbecile. Squire Remington consulted a doctor highly eminent in such cases, and he declared that it was possible, though not probable, that if proper care were taken and the knowledge of her mother's state strictly kept from the girl, she might escape the hereditary taint. Isabel swore to her dying father to protect her young step-sister—swore never to allow her to leave Remington Manor—swore to save her, at any cost, from the knowledge of her mother's lunacy. So, Sir Henry Charleigh, for Isabel Remington's sake, you will assist her in protecting me, and I will arrange it at once. Perhaps, with your customary scepticism, you will venture to impugn the veracity of my statement; Miss Remington, however, will corroborate it." She rang the bell and commanded Miss Remington to be sent to her immediately.

The young man's soul revolted at the unlooked-for turn the tables had taken. His dangerous adversary's horrible revelation had half-stupefied him. Great heavens! was this vile, abandoned criminal still to pollute the hallowed sanctity of Isabel Remington's presence? Was she, with her woman's daring and devilry, to win the battle he had begun, despite his

sanguinity and the powerful weapons he had at command? No! Isabel Remington must be freed from the Frenchwoman's abhorrent companionship.

Again Isabel Remington left Adèle's sick-room to obey the summons to the library. She felt that her troubles could not be much greater, and a vague presentiment of their being lightened buoyed her up. When she appeared at the door the widow rushed forward and seized her by the wrist. "Isabel Remington!" she cried, fiercely, "this man has the power to force me from your roof. Is he to do it? Yes, or no?"

"Say yes, Isabel," interposed Sir Henry, "I will protect Adèle."

"Yes," answered the poor girl, obeying her lover implicitly, and hardly knowing what she said.

"Then," cried the Frenchwoman, lashing herself into unrestrained fury, "the whole county shall know that Mrs. Remington is alive and a madwoman—the name—the grand old name of Remington that you are so proud of—shall be dragged through the mire and trampled in the dust. More than that; poor little sensitive Adèle shall learn the fact of her mother's insanity, and the knowledge shall rankle in her sensitive mind and ruin her young life. Recall that word, Isabel Remington, or you will repent it in sackcloth and ashes. Imagine the lovely little Adèle becoming gradually a helpless idiot."

Isabel writhed in agony at the thought of this fearful picture; she flung herself at the feet of her tormentor, clasping her hands in heartrending, voiceless appeal.

"No, no!" cried Joan Dryburgh, rushing from behind the screen. "Kneel not to her; I can protect you," and she raised the suppliant figure of her young mistress. Adèle's nurse had startled the trio by her strange and sudden appearance. Her face had a determined resolution and a death-like whiteness; a weird, unearthly light shone in her eyes.

"Indeed," sneered Madame; "and how, pray?"

"I remember you," said Mrs. Dryburgh, looking contemptuously at the Frenchwoman; "you were Mrs. Remington's maid, and no more her cousin than I am. Yes, you are Angélique—you became an actress and married a painter, I think."

"Oh, Joan," implored Isabel, distractedly, "save me from this woman if you can. God will reward you."

"I will, my dear lady, for I believe you will forgive me. I have sinned, but I have suffered. Look on my face. I am not thirty-five, yet—but look how a guilty conscience has withered my features and

whitened my hair. I have a confession to make that can save you from this woman."

Sir Henry and Isabel listened in breathless silence.

"Well, out with this wonderful confession," said Madame, derisively. "It is exceedingly inopportune, but we may as well hear it. I dare say your eccentric eavesdropping propensities have enabled you to understand matters; but perhaps you do not believe that Mrs. Remington is alive, and in Paris."

"I believe Mrs. Remington to be dead," answered the white-haired woman. "I never saw her."

"Then whom does this confession concern?" asked the widow, a little nervously. "Are you going to try to disprove my statement about Adèle Remington's mother?"

"It is false," flashed out Joan Dryburgh.

"How?" asked Madame, in a hoarse whisper, her voice becoming paralysed at a dreaded presentiment of defeat.

"Because," declared Joan Dryburgh, "*I am Adèle Remington's mother.*"

Had a thunderbolt fallen into the room the consternation could hardly have been more intense. The fan of the baffled French adventuress dropped from her unnerved fingers, and once more the ghastly pallor shone through the rouge on her cheeks. Sir Henry was half stupefied with a thrill of joy that entered his heart—the joy of a bright hope nearing its consummation. Although no proof had yet been produced, there was something in the great solemnity of the nurse's declaration that forced the truth on her listeners. Isabel, after a minute's bewilderment, flung herself on Joan Dryburgh's breast and sobbed aloud.

"Oh, Joan, I believe it," she cried hysterically. "I believe it—a hundred half-forgotten circumstances force the truth of it into my heart. God in His goodness sent you to release me from my detestable thralldom; I knew He would not leave my prayers unanswered."

"Can you ever forgive me, my dear lady?" asked Joan.

"I have nothing to forgive—if I have I forgive you and bless you. Do explain all to us."

"Thirteen years ago," said the nurse, "when I lived at a village near Cannes, your father engaged me to nurse what he called his motherless girl, who was only a month old at the time. I had a child of my own of the same age, but so tempting was the Squire's offer (for he particularly wanted an English nurse) that I placed my own baby-girl under the charge of

another woman and entered your father's service."

"What a strange thing to do!" exclaimed Isabel.

"I was very poor—worse than poor, for I was in debt. My husband died before my baby was born—I had no friends—I was a stranger in a strange land—I was not strong enough to earn money in any other way. To be brief, the two children, the Squire's and mine, rather resembled each other, both had light blue eyes and the promise of very light hair. Occasionally my child was brought to the Squire's residence by the woman I had employed to keep it. Once she was obliged to leave it with me for a whole day, and a terrible temptation assailed me, for on that day the Squire's child died suddenly in a fit of convulsions. The temptation was irresistible—I changed the children. My guilty work was very easy, for the Squire was well-nigh distracted at what we all believed to be his wife's death, and at that time left the entire care of his child to me. The infant daughter of Squire Remington was buried in Cannes cemetery as my child, and the dear girl you know as Adèle Remington is my daughter."

"I believe it, Joan," cried Isabel; "but what proof have you?"

"Not sufficient to convince a jury, perhaps. I can show you a portrait of myself when a girl of eleven; its likeness to Adèle could not have been more striking had she sat for the painter; a distant relative of mine who is alive can swear that it is my likeness. Ah! I am changed now; grief and a sin-burdened conscience have made sad ravages on me. Your father often told us that Adèle did not resemble his wife, except that both were fair. I am ready to swear that I speak the truth—to swear it on the Bible—on my oath before God. Often have I resolved to make my confession to you, but I could never summon the courage. I could not trust myself to live in the same house with Adèle, and I sought the solitude of Elm Cottage. When passing that door I overheard some one speaking in a loud voice of Adèle Remington's mother. Can you wonder that I listened? Oh, I hope you will believe my story?"

"I do, Joan," said Isabel. "Your confession has made me extremely happy. Something within tells me that you speak the truth. May God forgive your sin as freely as I do!"

The Frenchwoman's brazen effrontery did not desert her even at such a crisis. She walked towards the door, laughing disdainfully. "It is a pretty story," she cried;

"admirably trumped up, and rather creditably acted. I must persuade you to go on the stage, Mrs. What's-your-name. Your performance would have elicited several rounds of applause and secured you a recall. Changed the children, indeed! Not an uncommon occurrence in novels and plays!" Then she turned on them with the savage ferocity of an infuriated tigress at bay. "Isabel Remington, if you give credence to this nursery-woman's absurdly-concocted falsity, you will bitterly rue it. Don't think that her asseverations will impose upon me. I am not to be so easily cheated. Remember that."

With a venomous glare on her enemies as she left them, Angélique Delarne, *alias* Coralie de Beranger, went quietly to her own room. Despite her defiance, she must have known that all her plans were completely routed. From her dressing-case she extracted a small vial, grimly labelled with a single word—Poison! She must have been actuated by a burning desire to quit the scene of her defeat, for in a few minutes she was enveloped in a dark cloak and veil, and hurriedly making her way to the nearest railway station. The London train was beginning to move as she entered it, without inquiring its destination or taking a ticket.

The fatal vial was emptied ere the train completed its journey. When London was reached there was discovered, in a first-class compartment, the dead body of a woman which the French detectives pronounced to be that of the missing Angélique Delarne.

## CHAPTER VI.

HE last roses of summer were beginning to shed their perfumed petals and follow their earlier mates of the Remington gardens, when Adèle rose from her sick-bed. The fever had been kind to the beautiful young girl; her face, indeed, looked thinner, and her short hair, like a mass of gold in tiny lustrous tendrils, gave her a boyish appearance. The knowledge that Joan Dryburgh was her mother had, of course, been purposely withheld till she was considered sufficiently recovered to bear any serious surprise.

A marvellous change came over the heiress of Remington. Roses stole into her cheeks as they faded from her gardens; the light of love brightened her clear, grey eyes; her patrician gait regained its regal grace; and the inestimable blessing of a good man's love had wrought these changes.

Sir Henry Charleigh was soon to lead her to the altar.

"I have news from Paris to-day, Henry," said Isabel to her affianced husband, as they walked in the gardens. "I have heard that poor papa's wife has been dead more than a year; the proprietor of the asylum where she was confined has written to me. The wicked Angélique kept it a secret in order to strengthen her power over me.

"I never could understand," said Sir Henry, "why the woman, a French lady's-maid, was trusted so much."

"Oh, Henry, I hardly know how to explain the horrible details. You can understand how distracted papa was at the appearance of his wife's insanity when his child was born. Angélique's services were of great value to him at such a time; she was very clever, and managed everything so well, and especially the necessary confinement in a Paris asylum, that the affair was kept a secret, and her death believed in England. Oh, I repeat to you for about the hundredth time, how grateful I was that Angélique, when found dead in a railway carriage, was never known to have lived in my house. Had the papers got hold of that fact how horrible it would have been for me! I have never doubted Joan Dryburgh's story; that picture of herself, when a child, is alone very conclusive proof. My father left Adèle's fortune and dowry entirely to my discretion—her name is now Adèle Remington Dryburgh, my adopted sister and ward. She will be my bridesmaid next month, since you so particularly wish it, unless—"

"Unless what, my dear Izzie?"

"Oh, Henry, the dear child has a great trial in store for her. I cannot shut my eyes to the fact that Mrs. Dryburgh is dying; I have known it ever since Aunt Margaret returned here."

"Poor Adèle!" said Sir Henry, and silence ensued for a few minutes.

"Have you heard from your friend in Paris, Henry?"

"Yes; Emile de Raulleau has at last consented to be my groomsman."

"Is it really true, Henry, that my troubles are at an end?"

"Yes, my darling," said her lover fondly. "Every cloud has its silvery side—the darker it is the brighter the lining. Oh, my dearest, love like mine will overcome all things; and henceforward the purpose of my life will be to shield yours from the veriest shadow, ay, even the shadow's shadow, of a single cloud."

She leant lovingly on his strong arm as they wandered on among the fading roses

and the miniature forests of crimson gladioli, while the birds sang sweetly and joyously, as if echoing the love and happiness that thrilled their beating hearts.

The scene that must close this little history is a sad one. Adèle Dryburgh sat at her mother's bedside. Blinds darkened the room from the bright daylight; no sound was heard save the troublous breathing of the invalid.

"Adèle," murmured Joan, restlessly.

"Yes, mother."

"Mother!" repeated Joan. "Oh, how I longed to hear you call me that—how I maddened and pined to hear you say it, with your little soft arms clasped round my neck. Mother! The word alone seems to revive me. You remember, Adèle, that very old elm-tree where you used to sing and read to me as I sat knitting or sewing. I wish you to make it there."

"Make what there, mother dear?"

"My grave."

"No, mother, no," cried Adèle, with a start, "you must not say that. When you get better we shall never, never part, and nobody in all the wide world will be happier."

"It is too true, my darling. I am on my way to answer for all my sins. Oh, my child, my child!" cried the dying woman, in a wild, pleading voice, "let the last words I hear on earth be words of forgiveness. Tell me once more that you forgive me."

"Dear mother," answered Adèle, with tearful eyes, "ever since I have known you were my mother, I have forgotten and forgiven everything. I only remember how much we love each other. Can I forget how untiringly you watched over me when I was ill? That is why you are weakly now—you were too devoted to me. I would have died but for you."

"My malady is incurable," said Joan, faintly; "I am far past all doctors' skill."

"Tell me, mother, what this mysterious trouble is?"

"A broken heart."

Adèle knelt down by the bed and wept as if her own young heart would have broken.

"You must think kindly and forgivingly of me when I am gone. It was for your sake that I sinned. Oh, my darling, we were so helpless. Grief for your poor father's death had shattered my health. I could not resist the temptation—I dared not undo my work; and my guilt has crushed my life. Remember it was for your sake."

"Think no more of it, dearest mother," sobbed Adèle, bitterly. "I look upon it as no sin."

"But it was, Adèle; it was a sin against you—a fraud against my employer—a great sin against God. It made your very existence a wicked lie. Cherish the little picture I have given you. Don't cry, Adèle. Remember the spot under the old elm-tree—promise to make it there; and when the sweet springtime comes again plant there forget-me-nots and violets, and the birds will sing——"

"Oh, no, no," cried Adèle, wildly, with streaming eyes. "Don't speak like that, mother; it breaks my heart to hear you. If you were to die I should wish to die with you. You must live for my sake."

"I should like it, my darling," said Joan, in a faint whisper; "but God wills it otherwise. I feel very exhausted, Adèle—the breath of life is fast leaving me. Erect a little white cross under the old elm-tree, with the words of Christ that have comforted me so very much. Remember them, Adèle—you will find them in the tenth verse of the fifteenth chapter of St. Luke—*'There is joy in the presence of the angels if God over one sinner that repented.'*

Adèle's passionate weeping prevented any answer.

"Kiss me again, my darling; press your face closer to mine; forgive your poor mother." The voice grew feebler still—it sank to a low murmur—then it was forever hushed, and the eyes closed in death.

Adèle still sobbed piteously on her mother's breast. Her mother's breast!

Ah, no! poor little Adèle was motherless indeed. There was a world of un-speakable affection and tenderness in that last lingering embrace—there were volumes of ineffable love in the fond pressure of, las, alas!—

"The living cheek to the cheek of clay."

THE END.

### UNDER THE WILLOWS.

She sat 'neath the bending willows,  
By the margin of the stream,  
That rippled so gently by her,  
As she dreamt her heart's first dream—  
A dream of love and of beauty,  
That would never pass away,  
Of a life made pure and holy,  
Of a never-ending day.

She sits 'neath the drooping willows,  
The sky is no longer bright,  
The stream is no longer singing  
A song of love and of light.  
Her dream has gone by for ever,  
Like a Zephyr's fleeting breath;  
From her eyes sad tears are falling,  
Now she only longs for death.

# TEA-TABLE TALK.—BY AMY KEN.

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**H**ELENA was early at Miss Ken's assembly this day. She was desirous of knowing what would be the great feature of the London season this year. "For," she said, "it will be the first in which I have been at the head of a household."

"Well," replied Miss Ken, "every season seems to be marked out by leaders of fashion nowadays for something novel. A few years ago nothing was accepted but croquet, then came Badminton and other varieties of the game. After this followed garden parties with Badminton left out, sham conservatories hired for the occasion, and a dance on the greensward. An attempt was afterwards made to bring the old game of *Le Gras* into fashion. This is, in my estimation, an elegant recreation, requiring little skill, with only a slight amount of exertion. Last year it was bazaars and fancy-fairs, and fashionable ladies donned the garments of their grandmothers and appeared in bibs and tuckers, curtseying the while to visitors who attended 'Ye Old English Fayre,' which was nominally held for the purpose of some charity. This was well enough for once or twice, or even half-a-dozen times; but the novelty palled, until you heard the drawing-room man, who wanted to kill time, say, 'Bother the old fairs! I don't care a *doit* about them;' and the fashionable lady would respond 'Nor do I; we are only making guys of ourselves without sufficient reason.'"

"Will you tell us the meaning of *doit*?" asked Judith.

"Perhaps I ought to have used a more modern word; but there is even fashion in this, for ladies as well as gentlemen are picking up words of this kind that modern dictionaries had made obsolete. The word *doit* is evidently derived from the French *d'huile*, the eighth of a penny, but has been used metaphorically for the smallest coin in existence. Thus, Shakespeare says, in the 'Tempest,' 'when they will not give a *doit* to relieve a lame beggar, they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian.' Pope, too, has some singular lines in which he introduces the word:—

'In Anna's wars a soldier, poor and old,  
Had dearly earned a little purse of gold.  
Tired with a tedious march, one luckless night,  
He slept, poor dog, and lost it to a *doit*.'

So that you see in using this word I am only following learned men."

"But, aunt," said Helena, "you have not answered my question. What will be the fashionable amusement this season in London?"

"Well, this year little doubt exists that private theatricals will be the prevailing fashion. It is surprising to see how many newly built mansions have the drawing-rooms so arranged that the builder explains they would make an admirable stage. The hint thus given has already been carried out in many instances; and thus the fashion commenced, and the rage for amateur acting increases every week. Old houses have been found to possess rooms which can be converted into theatres *pro tem.*, and the young people in almost every aristocratic establishment are over busy in arranging private theatricals at home or assisting some of their friends and neighbours. Then, again, it has been decided by general consent that the scene-painting shall be done by none but amateur hands, that the dresses shall be made by amateur fingers, that the band shall be composed of amateur musicians, and that the very attendants who shift the scenes shall be amateurs also. It was even suggested that the waiters upon the company should, for the nonce, be ladies and gentlemen who would don the housemaid's gown and footman's livery; but this has been overruled, and the servants will, therefore, be the only persons except the audience who appear in their real characters."

"Don't you think this a very excellent idea," said Helena, "and a good employment of spare time?"

"If the plays performed tend to elevate the minds of the young, if they represent virtue receiving its reward, whilst vice is punished, and show the fearful agony experienced by those whose conscience is troubled, it may improve society and make morality better observed, whilst the active employment in the necessary preparation will be useful to health. Almost anything is better than young people falling into lethargic habits; and after all, it is often easier for a lady to represent the quiet dignity, the simplicity and æsthetic bearing, than for a great comedian or a tragedy queen to succeed in it. The fashionable lady given by the exigency of the play a dramatic position would in nine instances out of ten fail lamentably. Happily for the purpose of the amateur, there are plenty of plays that are amusing and short, and do

not make too strong a demand on supposed dormant histrionic power. To look pretty and graceful, to be dressed to advantage, and by the aid of memory to take a part without too obviously seeming to do so—these are what ladies are so accustomed to in everyday life that the presence of foot-lights makes little practical difference. There are a few rehearsals, and then things work very smoothly. Nearly a century ago France set us the example of private theatricals, and we followed her. At that period Madame de Genlis, if not the originator, was certainly the most successful, and the most beautiful, perhaps, of the leaders of the new fashion. Dress, no doubt, told even more than the acting; and beauty was at that time more respected than talent. In the costume of a cobbler's wife this grand lady of the world looked so lovely that the Prince du Conti not only fell in love with her, but sent for an artist to the château expressly to paint her in her eccentric but becoming costume. Imitators, of course, soon arose. A Madame de Montesson sought to rival Madame de Genlis. At the theatre of Villiers-Cotterets she appeared on the stage as *Pomona*, and such was her success that the Duc d'Orléans offered his hand, and was accepted, and married, as he afterwards said, the greatest actress in the world. Histrionically, *Pomona* was probably not a very great part, but there could be no doubt that the Duchess d'Orléans achieved a great triumph. The example set by these two ladies was soon to be followed by many imitators; and amateur theatricals became as popular in the reign of Louis XV. as æstheticism in the reign of Queen Victoria. Quickly following this, private theatricals were the rage in England, and to obtain distinction as an amateur was the great desire of ladies and gentlemen in high society. But with the mania for amateur acting came after awhile a laxity of morals, and a cry was raised against it. The assertions made were that such a custom weaned the ladies away from home associations, and impregnated in their minds too ambitious ideas; and for a lengthened period none but professionals appeared on the stage; but of late years the better class professionals have been found as a rule so thoroughly educated and so prudent in character that they have been accepted as guests in the houses of the highest aristocracy, and amateurs are no longer ashamed to mingle with them, and even to take part in the legitimate drama."

"This is really a nice picture you give us," said Helena; "and I shall never rest until we can have an amateur gathering.

Will you kindly select a play for us, and assist us in getting-up one?"

"I shall have no objection to do this, with the understanding, however, that it does not lead to midnight acting, and that the time of all my nieces is not consumed on this one idea. Taken as a natural recreation it may afford pleasure without interfering with duty. Shortly I will endeavour to sketch out a plan for you."

"Thanks," said Judith. "I know a friend of papa's who would willingly join us. That is Mr. Crawford, who is in the Hanaper Office."

"Yes," said Annie. "Will you tell us what the Hanaper clerks have to do?"

"Like many other law terms, the word *hanaper* is supposed to have rather a singular origin. The *Hanaper Office* belongs to the Court of Chancery. Writs relating to the business of the subject and their returns were, according to the simplicity of the ancient times, kept in a hamper—in *hanaberio* were the Latin words. In contradistinction to the *hanaper* writs, other documents relating to such matters wherein the Crown is immediately or mediately concerned were kept in a little sack or bag, the Latin words being *in parva burga*; and hence has arisen the distinction of the Hanaper Office and Petty Bag Office, which both belong to the Common Law Court in Chancery. I therefore assume that your friend is really a clerk in Chancery."

"One more question I must ask you, if you please," said Annie. "We have a new gas stove in the library in which asbestos is burnt, and it never seems to consume?"

"The very meaning of the Greek word *asbestos* is, 'incapable of being extinguished or destroyed.' It is a fibrous mineral, which can be woven into an incombustible cloth. At the Building Exhibition recently held in the Agricultural Hall this mineral was shown in large quantities. It felt like stone; and yet by machinery in your presence a large percentage of it was made into fleecy wool. An old book called 'Feltham's Resolves' says, 'A good man, like an *asbestine* garment, as well as a tobacco-pipe when foul, is cleansed by burning.'

"Do you believe garments could be made of the wool?" asked Helena.

"Certainly; yet I don't think it would be pleasant wear, particularly next the skin. Bacon, even in his day, however, suggested a use for it. He says: 'There may be such candles as are made out of salamander's wool, being a kind of mineral which whiteth in the burning, and consumeth not.'

## FAMOUS MEN AND WOMEN.

### BARONESS BULWER LYTTON.

WHEN in March, 1882, the newspapers announced the death of the Dowager Lady Bulwer Lytton, it brought with it, to the minds of persons past the meridian of life, associations of the past, in which the fashionable world was much interested. In 1839 a book appeared called "Cheveley; or, The Man of Honour," which much delighted the gossips of those days. The book had been loudly heralded by the usual announcements of publishers some months before its appearance, and paragraph writers had been informed that "real personages"—and these related to what it was then the fashion to call the *haut ton*—existed in its pages; and these made good use of their pens so as to render the public on the *qui vive* for a feast of scandal. They were not disappointed, for the book appeared, with the author's name attached—Lady Lytton Bulwer. She dedicated the work to "No One Nobody, Esq., of No Hall, No Where," and she commences thus: "Dear Sir,—In dedicating these volumes to you, I acquit myself of a debt of gratitude to the only man whose integrity I have found unimpeachable, and whose friendship I have found unvarying. Among the most deserving of my own sex I have, in many instances, found sincere and unchanging affection, united with those higher and rarer virtues which from adorning reconcile us to human nature, though truth compels me to acknowledge that I have known others whose deep-rooted selfishness, puerile vanity, and vacillating weakness of character proved them to be *Nature's worst anomalies*—masculine women." Then continuing to address Mr. Nobody, she says: "Generally speaking, Folly's cap and bells are to be found as often, if not oftener, on the hoary head of age as on the Hyperion curls of youth; but you are an exception, for you are the only man whom 'flattery fools not,' or interest does not warp—ay, even the small, paltry interest of a dinner, a speech, a paragraph in a newspaper, or a *tabouret* in a demoralised and demoralising coterie. Such divinity doth hedge the vices of men that no man cares to expose or interfere with those of another; but whatever the injuries, outrages, and persecutions of us women may be, men invariably, whether from cowardice, coldness, craft, caution, self-interest, or selfishness, shrink from all interference in our legitimate ill-treatment." Well, when they had read the book, the public learnt, what they had already known, that Lady Bulwer Lytton had separated from her husband upon some quarrel; but of the

validity of her indictment they were neither qualified nor called upon to judge. Some critics, shocked with the writer's mode of bringing her domestic grievances, real or imaginary, before the public, visited her proceedings with grave censure; others, impressed with a certain eccentric and excited tone pervading her book, took a more kindly view, and contented themselves with expressing a hope that the author of "Cheveley" would ere long come to agree with her critics in thinking that her work had better have been withheld from the press. Adverse criticism, however, whether mild or severe, was what Lady Bulwer was not of a temperament to endure; and from that time she devoted herself to a sort of war with "the gentlemen of the Press," whose praise she declared in the dedication to her next work, "The Budget of the Bubble Family," published in 1840, was "a blot, and whose support a degradation." Her husband, then Sir Lytton Bulwer, at first took no public notice of his lady's writings, though they clearly pointed to himself and others associated with him; but when a malicious rumour was circulated which attributed to him a satirical rejoinder in verse, entitled "Lady Cheveley; or, The Woman of Honour," he commissioned his solicitor to write to the newspapers in these words: "Whatever the views and objects may be (probably not inimical to himself, judging by the terms of the announcement), Sir Lytton Bulwer is compelled, for the sake of his children, and in their name, to enter his most earnest protest against any attempt to prolong or widen the notoriety of a recent publication which carries its own answer and its own condemnation." Lady Lytton Bulwer had a very facile pen, and from time to time new novels appeared, which were always certain to be popular, because in them were clever phases of character, mingled with satirical outpourings, which the scandalmongers would make applicable to this or that person; and here and there are strong evidences of creative power. In the "School for Husbands" there are some good characters, but some very hard hits upon society, and especially on members of the Press.

If Lady Lytton Bulwer is correct in saying she suffered as a wife, she certainly, from her writings, must have been miserable when separated from her husband; and from some evidence of this kind it was assumed she was insane, and for a time was confined. Mr. Thomas Muloch, when treating on British lunatic asylums, public and private, in a pamphlet published in 1858, selects the case of this lady as an

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BARONESS BULWER LYTTON.

example of injustice. He says: "After years of continual scribbling, Sir Lytton Bulwer betook himself to political life, and to occasional elaborate speechifying in the senate. In the wild vicissitudes of party he had been lifted into statesmanship, and he is at present Secretary for the Colonies, alternately penning despatches and spinning out monthly fictions for 'Blackwood.' And this elevation of an author to a seat in the Cabinet brings us, strangely enough, to the sad story of the Minister's wife, Lady Lytton Bulwer. This lady is of a highly respectable Irish family; and it is also said that her union with the baronet was a love-match, as all marriages ought to be. It appears, however, that domestic differences arose—that the parties separated—and have also (as is common in such cases) done their worst, though living apart, to make each other miserable. The chief mode of annoyance hitherto seems to have been a kind of literary rifle-shooting in their respective writings—for Lady Lytton Bulwer is an authoress of some note, and evidently gets up novels to annihilate her liege lord. I have only read a few passages from her books, but my impression is that she has more masculinity of mind than her clever husband. She discerns much of the peculiar trickeries of our times, and castigates society very vigorously—spoiling her subject, however, by too frequent allusions to her own real or fancied wrongs. Well, Sir Lytton Bulwer, having accepted the seals of office, it became necessary that he should seek re-election from his Hertfordshire constituents. Lady Bulwer, with very questionable notions of taste and propriety, repairs to the hustings, cows the candidate into hasty retreat, and then addresses the electors in a very vituperative speech against her own husband! All this is manifestly wrong and discreditable on the part of the lady; but error of one kind does not excuse error of another kind; and it is plain that Sir Lytton Bulwer now acted very blamably. He sends a doctor and a lawyer to Taunton, where his wife had long resided, evidently to entrap her by means of those professional emissaries, and a sort of negotiation is opened, ostensibly to improve the lady's exchequer, who complained of being deeply in debt from deficient income. No fiscal arrangements being made, Lady Bulwer goes to London, and, accompanied by a female friend, repairs to the doctor and claims the fulfilment of his promises on behalf of his employer. The doctor, who is no doubt a practitioner well-up in these arts, detains his visitor on several pretexts, and then, all being ready, sends her, as he solemnly states, *not* to a private lunatic asylum, but

to a genteel kind of 'lock up,' where patients are received into a friendly family, who have some nice, spare rooms of a conservative class, the windows being adorned with iron bars, and a few strait-waist-coats lying handily in a dark closet. In this benign mansion Lady Bulwer disappears from public gaze; and all appears to be satisfactory and silent, when suddenly a meeting of indignant Englishmen is convened at Taunton. Speeches are effectively made by persons who protest against their sane, clever lady-friend being carried off in so infamous a fashion, and dealt with as though she were a mad-woman. The proceedings are reported and published, causing much more consternation at the Colonial Office than if all Caffraria were devastated by fire and sword! What is to be done? Why, Lady Bulwer is to be liberated, and by the advice, too, of Dr. Conolly and Dr. Forbes Winslow, the very doctors who seem to have certified as to her lunacy a few days previously. The *Times* inserts a paragraph 'by authority,' saying that the whole affair had been adjusted to the complete satisfaction of all parties concerned—the two mad doctors publish letters to show that they had acted *en rigle* in certifying Lady Bulwer to be both insane and sane, according to the pressure of circumstances; and the poor lady is escorted to the Continent, where it is hoped she will not be shut up in a *maison de santé*! This is exactly what Mr. Muloch said in his pamphlet; and he reasoned from this point that if such atrocities were tolerated in this country, but little importance could be attached to *Magna Charta* or the *Habeas Corpus* Act. Things have strangely altered since then, and Lady Lytton (for her husband being created a baron she claimed the title of baroness) lived more than thirty years afterwards to see the alterations made in the law. Neither poor nor rich lunatics are admitted into any asylum now without clear and distinct proof that they have really lost their reason.

Lady Lytton did not remain long in France, and latterly lived in a pretty villa near Sydenham; but even in old age she had a fixed idea that the male sex had entered into a conspiracy to suppress female talent. She was verging on seventy-five when she died, but is said in her later days to have completely altered her opinion of men and manners. She saw that she had been condemning the whole sex because she had found some bad specimens in her not uneventful life. The people, she said, were improving, but she yet averred her earlier impressions were right at the time.

# CYRIL'S WIFE.

BY SARA DUNN,

AUTHOR OF "THE STORY OF AGATHA," "MR. LUCOMBE'S WARDS," "FORTUNE'S WHEEL," ETC.

## CHAPTER I.



while her features were perfect in form, even if rather too *prononcée* in their type. But with youth and animation still in their earliest bloom, that defect was not ever suspected ; and Gabrielle was at the present moment not only beautiful, but gloriously beautiful in her whole aspect, and her stately bearing—more stately than is quite usual in so young a creature, for in truth neither of the sisters had attained their twenty-second year, and Gabrielle was just twenty at the time of their Cornish visit. \*

"Yes, it is very grand and glorious. I am glad you admire it so much, Edna," said Cyril, eagerly ; "you"—and he lowered his voice, though not so much as to escape the sharp ears of the silent and observant Gabrielle—"it may—it will, I trust, be one day—your home."

The dark shadow and the sudden start which the words brought to the younger sister were scarcely more marked than the bright blush and the sweet, shy glance that made Edna so lovely. Cyril was, perhaps, too much engrossed by the one to perceive the other ; and as he once more turned from the well-pleased contemplation of the tell-tale signs, all trace of emotion had vanished from Gabrielle's features.

"And—shall we go to see those wonderful caves that I have heard so much about?" asked Edna, eagerly.

"Yes, certainly, dear Edna—that is, we will visit the more celebrated or the more dangerous ones at the spring tides, when the sea is at the lowest," returned Cyril ; "but there are no end of the ordinary ones, which would excite surprise anywhere else, and which you can visit at your leisure and your pleasure also," he added, smiling.

H, Cyril ! what a glorious prospect ! what sands ! what grand cliffs ! and that great Atlantic rolling its stately waves with such a regular solemn pace!" exclaimed Edna Percy, as she gazed for the first time on the rugged Cornish coast, from the little village of Newquay, where she and her sister, with their guardian—Mr. Elmore—and his son, had arrived on the previous day.

Edna was, perhaps, scarcely to be called beautiful, nor even pretty, strictly speaking ; but she was refined and elegant-looking ; with a mobile, intellectual face, and large, beautiful, expressive eyes, that lighted up or melted at the pleasure of their possessor. Her sister Gabrielle was of a different style. She had a splendidly moulded figure, a rich brunette skin, eyes, and hair ;

"Are they really so dangerous?" asked Gabrielle, suddenly appearing to wake up, from the contemplation of some rare ferns near to them, to a sense of the conversation going on.

"Yes, there have been many accidents—some fatal," returned Cyril, "and very likely some that are not known. A lonely tourist might easily be missing without any one suspecting his fate; and if the tide catches any one unaware of its rapidity they would have small chance of escape."

Edna shuddered at the idea. "How terrible! what a fearful death to die—waiting for the last wave to sweep one away to destruction!" she said, drawing nearer to Cyril, as if for shelter from the very terrors he had conjured up.

Gabrielle only laughed. "What a coward you are, Edna!" she said. "Come, we must be quick, or we shall be too late for dinner, and that would be a cardinal sin in our guardian's eye." And they hastened homeward, without any further delay or conversation on the subject that had so interested the timid Edna, succeeding at last in saving their character with the precise Mr. Elmore, who was—to use his son's expression—"savagely punctual."

"Well, you must be careful, that is all," said the old gentleman, when the girls had recounted to him their experiences of the morning; "but," he added laughingly, "I have lived many a long year in this neighbourhood when I was young, and never met with the least misadventure; and," he went on, with a meaning glance at his elder ward, "I should not like to think that any one so nearly connected with me was a coward in my native county."

Edna's colour flitted painfully across her cheeks, like a roseate summer cloud; and Cyril smiled significantly at the allusion to what in truth was his dearest wish, though it had been as yet rather understood than expressed.

The girls soon retired after this little passage-of-arms; and the father and son were left alone.

"Well, Cyril, it is now time to speak to you on a subject that is very near my heart," began the old gentleman, pouring out another glass of port. "We are about to take possession of the home of my fathers, and with sufficient means—thanks to my success in life—to restore it to something like its former beauty, and—I may say—splendour. You are pretty well aware, my boy, that the place had gone to rack and ruin, owing to extravagance and misfortune on which I need not dwell. What I want to say is this, Cyril. I have enough to restore Eothen: I have not

quite—no, nor nearly—the means to keep it up as it should be, and was intended to be kept. It is for you to supply the rest."

"My dear father, I am afraid I shall be a very broken stick to depend upon in such an emergency," said the young man, with a troubled glance.

"Not at all, my boy; it needs very little on your part to complete the work I have so long laboured to accomplish. You must make a marriage with a girl of fortune, who will help you in the matter. I have one already chosen for you."

"Not unless I love her, sir, I cannot; no, and even to please you, I will not," said Cyril, flushing.

"Nonsense, boy! I know that you will. Are you in love with some one already that you are so determined against accepting my choice?"

"Yes, I am—ay, and hopelessly and irretrievably; and I believe she returns it, though I have never yet told her my feelings," exclaimed the young man, vehemently. "I love Edna—I have always loved her as she deserves; and you ought not to have thrown us so much together if you did not mean it to end thus. How could you doubt that such an angel as she is must win any man's heart?"

"Gabrielle is more beautiful," observed Mr. Elmore, calmly.

"Not in my eyes."

"And suppose Edna had not a penny, and her sister had a fortune, you would stick to your choice in spite of prudence and my plans and purposes?"

"I grieve to offend you, sir, but I cannot be mercenary and false, even to please you. We should both be wretched, I assure you," he said eagerly, "if I were to marry any one else, whether it was Gabrielle or another. Do not ask it." And Cyril's eyes and his flushed face spoke more plainly than words of the warmth of his feelings.

Mr. Elmore laughed outright. "Oh, dear! oh, dear! what fools young people are!" he said. "There, cool down, my boy, and listen to me. I may be a romantic old fool myself, perhaps. In any case, I have too much knowledge of the human heart, and experience also, not to learn that a mercenary marriage is a dangerous experiment; and it was to avoid this that I have acted as I have done towards you and your cousins. The fact is, Cyril, my brother-in-law left his fortune to his eldest daughter, pretty much as most men do to an elder son; and, while Gabrielle only gets eight thousand pounds for her share, Edna will come into about fifteen hundred a year. Should anything happen to

the eldest, then it goes to the younger sister."

Cyril looked the astonished interest that he felt at this revelation. "I never imagined the girl was so rich," he said.

"No, nor did I wish you should; nor do they know it either," replied Mr. Elmore. "I saw that you and Edna were falling in love as quickly and deeply as could be desired; and I considered that if you spontaneously chose her rather than her beautiful sister, it showed that it was real love. Now, you have fulfilled my wishes, as you always have done from your birth, and I am a proud and happy father."

"And a most indulgent one, sir; I should be an ingrate to act otherwise," said Cyril, clasping his father's hand.

"Oh, yes, when it is according to your own fancy," laughed Mr. Elmore. "I think I heard a different tale a few minutes ago. But come, don't look abashed, boy. It is all as I wish, at any rate; and tomorrow you can speak to Edna, and all shall be arranged."

They rose as he spoke, and prepared to leave the room. "Why, the door is ajar," said Mr. Elmore as he reached it. "I hope no one has overheard us, Cyril."

"Oh, not likely," returned his son. "You know the servants are to be trusted; and besides, they are in the other part of the house. I hear them talking even now. There is no one else who could come into the hall without our hearing. It was an accident, no doubt."

The two gentlemen crossed the hall to the drawing-room, which was nearly opposite, but cut off by a second door from the hall, and entered by a small ante-room, in which stood a piano and harp. Edna was singing one of the old-English ballads in which her uncle delighted, and Cyril passed on to the drawing-room, afraid, perhaps, to trust his own self-control by near contact with the object of his affections, now that he was licensed to avow his feelings, and yet anxious to wait till they were alone, before betraying by word or look what a few hours would tell.

Gabrielle was not in the drawing-room; the book she had been reading, and some embroidery that she was working, lay on a small table at her usual seat, as if she had just left it; and Cyril was thankful to be alone in his delirium of happiness.

There was another who was equally craving for a brief solitude, though from a very different cause. Gabrielle Percy was pacing her bedroom at that moment with the rapid, troubled walk, and perhaps some of the fierce passions, of a hyena. The expression of her beautiful face was simply

terrible in the agony and rage that flashed from her glittering eyes and distorted her perfect features. Her hands were clasped in spasmodic passion, and real suffering, that seemed to master her in its gusts of violence.

"What shall I do?" she exclaimed. "What can I do? I will never live to see it—to see her in possession of love and wealth, and all that ought to be mine wholly with herself! Why am I to be poor, and neglected, and miserable, while she is in the height of bliss, and *his* idol—yes, *his*—the man I love—I worship. Yes, worship, and with a devotion of which she is incapable, with her colourless gentleness. Shall she enjoy all this—can I endure it? I must die, or go mad—or prevent it—which will it be? Have I this courage and this strength of passion for nothing? No, no—I swear it! So long as I have life and reason she shall never be Cyril's bride! But it will need such self-mastery as few could attain. Still, I will—I can—with such a motive."

Hastily pouring some ether and water into a glass, she drank it greedily, to stop the trembling faintness that was fast succeeding to that hurricane of violent, stormy feelings. Then she bathed her face, to restore its natural hue; and after a few moments' pause she stole downstairs, and passing through a side-door to the verandah that sheltered one side of the drawing-room, entered it by a window that had been left open, and stood by Cyril's side with a well-affected smile on her lips.

"Has the sweet strain lulled you to sleep, or were you only indulging in day-dreams, cousin mine?" she said playfully.

Cyril started. "I did not see you come in, Gabrielle," he said. "That made me so rudely absent, I suppose."

"That means, in courteous phrase, that my charming presence would have awakened you to animation," she laughed, "especially as you're eyes were fixed on yonder door, and could not see me come in through the window. I have been taking a moonlight view of the coast and the Atlantic since dinner; I really could not stay indoors," she said impatiently.

"You do admire our barren coast, then, Gabrielle, though you come from the verdant South?" he said kindly.

"Yes; and when I do admire or love, it is in earnest," she returned vehemently. "Edna is more fortunate—she can take things more calmly—more as a matter-of-course. It is a great blessing."

"Would you like to change with her?" asked Cyril, smiling.

The question roused the tigress once

more in the girl's troubled breast, and the voice in which she answered had something unnatural in it. "Change with her! well, no. It is glorious to worship one's idol—one's ideal. I would not lose the power of such enjoyment, even if it brings equal suffering. It is a gift I would die rather than relinquish," she added, in low, suppressed tones.

Cyril gazed at her in some surprise, and in uncontrollable admiration. She looked absolutely glorious in her flashing beauty, while the strength of the passion and feeling it expressed had something alluring in it to a youthful imagination; but Edna and his father came into the room at the moment, and the exquisite moonlight loveliness of his beloved soon dispelled the passing interest her sister had excited. "Who would prefer the raven to the dove?" and certainly the lover of Edna Percy had little inclination to wish the slightest change in her graceful feminine charms.

The sisters were alone in their mutual dressing-room for a few minutes before they retired to rest; and Gabrielle stood at Edna's side, seemingly gazing from the window on the moonlit scene, though her attention was really fixed on the envied girl who possessed such an undue share of gifts, and whom Gabrielle well-nigh hated for that involuntary fault.

"You are very happy, are you not?" she said abruptly. "And you expect to be more so ere long?"

"Are not you happy, Gabrielle?" was the evasive answer.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so. There is nothing very exciting down here for me, at any rate. It is different for you. Of course you expect an offer from Cyril before many days, or, perhaps, hours, are past, and mean to accept it?"

"Oh, Gabrielle, how can you talk so! I should dread to do anything so dangerous as to expect what might prove to be quite a delusion."

"Then you do not believe Cyril loves you?"

Edna blushed, and smiled as bewitchingly as if the question had been asked by her lover himself. "I sometimes think so, but still it may be because we are so much together; and you are so much more beautiful it doesn't seem likely he should choose me," she said half sadly.

Gabrielle remembered what she had overheard Cyril reply to that very remark from his father, and her teeth closed with jealous rage, as she turned away, lest she should betray herself fatally, even to Edna's unsuspecting innocence. To what

avail was her beauty, when it had neither brought her love nor wealth?

## CHAPTER II.

was done: the irrevocable words were spoken: Cyril Elmore and Edna Percy were "engaged," to use a modern phrase, or, as the more earnest and old-fashioned form is termed, were betrothed lovers. The scene which had accomplished this long-expected event was but a transcript of those that have been described some hundreds of times; but not so the feelings that it produced in the parties concerned.

"Edna and Cyril, my children, I pray that Heaven will pour down on you all the blessings that you deserve!" said Mr. Elmore, his voice faltering with emotion. "It is the dream of my life realised in the most perfect manner that can be imagined; and there only needs one more event to complete our happiness. I shall hope to give to our Gabrielle here the same good wish and blessing that I desire for you, and at no very distant time, and with as joyful a prospect."

"Do you indeed wish that, uncle?" asked Gabrielle, with a strange mixture of playfulness and sarcasm, that perplexed for the moment the worthy guardian to whom it was addressed.

"Of course I do, child," he answered, as the lovers moved away—to escape, perhaps, an embarrassing scene. "Of course I do, my child. How can you doubt it?" he returned kindly.

"Only that I doubt you love me as well as Edna," she said quickly.

"My dear girl, I make no difference between my ward-nieces," he replied, with a half-annoyed, half-kindly air. "Only, of course, as matters now stand, your sister is about to be doubly related to me, and that must to some extent affect my conduct to her just at first," he added apologetically. "But I love you exactly the same," he went on, taking her hand and bending down to kiss her fair face.

"Thanks, thanks," she said. "You see, uncle, I must feel rather lonely now that Edna will, of course, be engrossed by her new ties. Would you have been as willing to welcome me, if I had been in her place?" she went on wistfully.

"Of course, of course," he said hurriedly, a pang of consciousness seizing him as he spoke, for he knew quite well that he was, for more than one reason, glad that it should have been otherwise. "How can you doubt it, my love?"

Again she bent down her head, as she

whispered, "Edna is the eldest. Will she have more money than I have, uncle?"

"Perhaps; well, yes. But I really must not linger here with you, my spoiled niece," he replied. "Be assured you have, and always will have, my fatherly care and affection; and with your beauty and fortune you will no doubt make a better marriage than your sister. Who knows but that it may be a titled one?" he added, as he moved away.

Gabrielle remained in deep thought. "A title! yes, very likely, with my beauty and my *fortune*! Yes; such might be. Only all depends on what I can scarcely say myself—yet. Will my love turn to hate, or bring its return by its very strength? Time will show."

But as the days went on, Gabrielle's whole manner seemed to change. The impulse that had moved her to betray her feelings to her uncle was apparently only a passing result of the excitement of the hour. Nothing could be more affectionate, and playful, and gentle than her manner to the betrothed pair; and Edna's spirits rose as she perceived that her fears were unfounded, and that Gabrielle was even rejoicing in her happiness.

The wedding was to be celebrated with as little delay as possible, and Eothen completed in the absence of the bride and bridegroom, under the superintendence of Mr. Elmore and Gabrielle; but still the announcement of the fortunes that would respectively belong to the sisters was not yet made, or, at any rate, not to Gabrielle; but a few words that she casually overheard between the lovers gave some doubt whether Cyril had been as reticent as his father.

"Can you doubt it, Cyril? As if I am not only too thankful to bring you more treasure than my worthless self!" Edna had murmured as they were walking on the sea-shore. "I would not change had I ten times the amount." And again the ominous dark shadow came over Gabrielle's face and changed its expression to that of a "Norma" in her most jealous paroxysm of revenge.

"How can I bear it? how can I bear it?" she said to herself, as she walked unnoticed away, and pressing her hand on her side as she spoke. "But it will not be for long—it will not be for long!" \*

"Edna, we have at last a few hours to ourselves," said Gabrielle one morning some month before the wedding-day, when Mr. Elmore and Cyril had gone off to Penzance to complete the preliminary

arrangements for the marriage. "Let us enjoy ourselves once more as we used to do. I shall, perhaps, never have you to myself again. Let us take a long stroll on the sea-shore and pick up shells and seaweed as we did when we were children. You will soon be a dignified matron now, quite above all such trifles."

Edna laughed gaily. "No, no. I expect to be more joyous than ever, Gabrielle, when I am Cyril's wife. It has always seemed to me that some vague sorrow was hanging over me which oppressed my spirits; but now that is gone—all gone, and I shall feel safe and happy. I only want to see you as blessed, darling sister, to have no wish ungratified."

"Well, you must gratify my wish, at any rate," said Gabrielle, "and without delay, or we shall have no time for our wild expedition. Make haste, Edna!"

The girls were equipped without much delay, and set off for Porth, which was scarcely beyond a pleasant hour or so's walk.

"What is the matter, dear Gabrielle?" asked the bride-elect, as her sister more than once failed to hear or to understand what she was saying. "Are you ill or sad?" she went on, gazing at Gabrielle's white face.

"Nay, it is nothing—nothing, only that I feel parting with you, Edna. Of course you cannot enter into my feelings; but please do not notice my folly; it will soon pass off—when—it—is all over!" she went on, in a strange, constrained tone. And then she hurried on till they came to the remarkable caves which are only second to those of Bedethen for size and beauty.

"Look, Edna, we will get some of those ferns; they are most tempting. I must have them," exclaimed Gabrielle, gazing into the famed "Cathedral Cave," where beautiful specimens were certainly hanging in profusion.

Edna demurred. "But the tide may come up—we shall not be able to get back; and it comes to this cave sometimes, I have heard," said the girl, timidly.

"Nonsense; don't be such a coward! Remember what uncle said—he will be quite proud of you if you take him back some specimens of ferns from his favourite cave."

It was an all-prevailing argument, and Edna sprang into the mouth, and with trembling hands and a beating heart began the search for the beautiful and rare plants that flourished in that damp, shadowy spot.

"I will just go to the next cave while you are finishing here, lest time fails and

we might be overtaken," said Gabrielle. "There, don't be alarmed ; there is more than half-an-hour yet before the tide turns, only I want to secure a good collection as we are here."

Edna dared not again urge her fears in the face of such an assurance, but she anxiously called to her sister not to go to any distance. "Keep in view, please, dear Gabrielle ; you know I dare not go back alone through those deep bays. I should fancy every moment that the sea would catch me," she said pleadingly.

"All right, I will be near, and join you at the entrance of the cave," said Gabrielle, calling to her sister in a voice that the distance perhaps made hoarse and strange.

Edna submitted to the arrangement, and pursued her task with as much attention as she could command ; but the dashing of the waves, and the increasing sense of the loneliness of the place, not only impeded her efforts, but at length prevailed over her assumed courage, and she grasped the treasures she had succeeded in collecting and hastened from the cave.

The water had decidedly increased since she had entered it : there could be no doubt of it—it was no nervous fancy ; and her terrors frantically increased as she looked round at the loneliness and the expanse of water before her.

Could Gabrielle be mistaken ? Was the tide already coming in ? The idea well-nigh drove her wild.

"Gabrielle ! Gabrielle ! Quick !—come ! I am sure the tide is coming in ! Gabrielle !" she shrieked, again and again. But in vain. There was no response ; and Edna literally screamed in a fearful agony of despair. Her limbs nearly failed her in her frenzy ; but life was at stake, and she must not yield to such weakness.

She set off on her way back, with a half-reproachful idea that she might be leaving her sister to her lonely fate ; but she knew full well that her voice must have been heard ; and though she dared not and would not even admit the wretched thought, it almost seemed as if she had been in a sudden terror abandoned to her fate.

Poor trembling one ! on she sped ; but all seemed against her. The flight of steps that led down to the bay, which was the nearest for her path, was damp and muddy, and she more than once slipped and fell, while her poor shaking limbs failed her at every step. Every moment was precious, while that advancing sea was rolling steadily on ; but Edna's strength seemed paralysed by the increasing danger. She tottered to the sharp promontory which divided the bay from the next. It was

covered with the rushing waves. Before, behind, around was that relentless ocean. Certain death awaited her ; and her knees were gradually giving way under her agony of fear.

It was so cruel ! when on the brink of such happiness—when Cyril was so soon to be hers—when all was bright and joyous in her life ! She gave one beseeching prayer to Heaven to bless her Cyril, to wait him one last message of love ; and then she sank down in despair and exhaustion, to die alone and unseen—and yet so young and so richly blessed by all the gifts of nature and fortune !

The waves were rolling relentlessly along towards the corner of the bay to which she had retreated. They would make no distinction in their steady, majestic course, nor was Edna more fair, and young, and innocent than thousands of victims engulfed in that bottomless ocean.

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It was some hours later when Mr. Elmore and Cyril arrived at their temporary home, in confident expectation of meeting the bright and loving welcome of the fair sisters on their return ; but a moment's glance brought terror and dismay to both father and son.

"Oh, sir ! oh, Mr. Cyril, poor Miss Edna is lost ! She went out this morning, and has not returned. We are afraid she has been caught by the tide," said the woman who waited on the sisters ; "and Miss Gabrielle is half out of her mind, and we have been searching far and near but we cannot find her, poor dear young lady !"

For an instant the hearers of this dreadful tale were simply stunned—stricken with dismay. Then Cyril gave one fearful groan of anguish.

"It is false ! it cannot be ! Providence would not be so cruel as to rob me of my darling ! It is some wretched mistake ! She will be found ; she shall !" he repeated hoarsely. "I cannot bear it ! it is too great a trial !"

"Hush, my boy, hush !" said his father, with quivering lips. "We must hope for the best. Where is Miss Gabrielle ?"

"In her room, sir, walking up and down like one frantic. I will tell her you are come, sir," and the maid disappeared, soon to return with the pale, horror-stricken Gabrielle, in herself a sad confirmation of the truth.

"My poor girl ! what is this ? How came she—our darling—to go alone ? and so timid as she was !" asked Mr. Elmore.

"We went together. I was faint and giddy, and thought I had better return

home, and she said she would go farther and get some ferns, and she has not come back. Perhaps she will—perhaps she can be found," gasped the girl, trembling so violently that her uncle had to come to her support.

"My love, nerve yourself; we must think of others—of her—and poor Cyril here. You must calm yourself, and try to console him. As you say, it is not hopeless. Try to hope, and at least be brave in the great sorrow that has befallen him."

But it was of no avail. Gabrielle appeared to be too utterly horrified and crushed to be able to rouse herself from the terrible blow. No one could doubt the agony of her feelings when they saw the white face, the troubled eyes, and the quivering lips of the girl, which so well accorded with the magnitude of the trial; and Mr. Elmore, after some minutes' attempt to extract some more information, and to soothe the hopeless despair of the bereaved sister, at last dismissed her to her chamber and the care of her maid.

In truth, he could scarcely find leisure and attention to bestow on the living while so entirely engrossed with the search for the missing, if not the dead. There was so much to be done, and without delay. The servants had certainly done all that could lie in their power to find the absentee; but there were yet other measures to be taken, that only power of wealth could devise, and they were at once put in motion on the occasion.

The lifeboats, divers, and fishermen, well accustomed to the coast, were employed with heavy bribes to search for the missing one; but all in vain. No vestige of her remained—not even an article of clothing that she had worn on the occasion of her last fatal walk. The frantic lover and sorrowing guardian were incessant in their exertions, and the urgent arguments they used with the experienced seafaring men, accustomed to the coast from their childhood, but in vain. There was but one tale in answer to the despairing inquiries and adjurations of the bereaved relatives.

"It's no such uncommon thing, sir; there's been many a one caught like that on this coast. In fact, it's very dangerous except for those well acquainted with it to be alone for any length of time. There's no hope now—none. When the tide went back she would have been found if she had saved herself in any corner of the caves. Poor dear young lady, it's all over with her! and a sad, sad pity it is. But it can't be helped."

Such were the consolations and the con-

clusions of the experienced coast-men; and there remained no resource but to submit to the sorrow thus cast on them.

"Take me away!—take me away! I cannot bear to stay here. Her spirit seems to haunt the place! It will drive me mad!" said Gabrielle, wildly, when the conclusion of this search was announced to her. "Uncle, if you would save my life or my reason do not stay here."

What could be said in reply to such an appeal? There was but this one precious charge left to Mr. Elmore and Edna's lover. Gabrielle was now not only the sole ward, but the heiress of the large property that had been left to her sister. She had the right to be considered to be the chief, the only object for the love and the tender care of the mourners, and it might be that Mr. Elmore already formed some ulterior plans that would alleviate, if not remove, the more tangible effects of the calamity that had befallen them.

They made arrangements for a temporary tour that might relieve the first agony of their grief; and sadly and slowly they took their departure from the spot where the fond visions of bliss had been entertained that had culminated in such utter disappointment and despair.

### CHAPTER III.

HREE months had passed away, and the sorrowing trio had nearly completed the term of their intended absence.

"It is a simple duty to return home," said Mr. Elmore, who, as might be expected, was the most self-possessed and rational of the party in this crisis. "Life must not be altogether given to the dead, my boy; and not only have you duties, as the head of an old name and property, but Gabrielle has now a large fortune to dispose of and to control. She will be of age to take possession of it in a few months; and I am very, very anxious about her health and her spirits also. She will, I fear, be another victim if she has not something to soothe and to divert her mind."

Cyril looked up with more interest than he would have bestowed usually on any subject; but this was closely connected with the one that occupied his whole thoughts, and he asked eagerly: "What do you suppose can be done, my dear father? I fully agree with you that poor Gabrielle is sadly depressed and changed; but I cannot see that anything more can be tried than has been done. I know by

my own experience that change is but of little avail when the mind is saddened and diseased. The disease travels with us while seeking the remedy."

"True, true," said the father, hesitatingly. "But still, Cyril, there could be one, and only one, consolation imagined for her, and for us all."

Cyril looked uneasily at his father. "I do not quite understand you, my dear father," he said. "I only hope that Gabrielle may one day marry—that is the best substitute for her loss that I can imagine. It may console her for a sister. For me there is no such hope," he added, with a deep groan.

"That is just what I would hope might happen to you, my dear Cyril," said Mr. Elmore, taking courage. "Why should you at your age give yourself up to sorrow for a lost bride, however loved and charming? And what could be more congenial to your tastes and feelings than to have one always with you who is associated with the dead, and who will at once sympathise with you and supply her place?"

Cyril started, and his looks were little favourable to the hopes of his father. "Marry Gabrielle, would you say? Oh, it would be unnatural! She would never listen to it—it would be as repugnant to her ideas as mine."

"I am not so sure of that," returned Mr. Elmore, significantly. "I would not be too sure that Gabrielle does not love you, my boy. Only, of course she conceals it, as any woman would."

Cyril flushed. There is nothing very repugnant to a young man's feelings to be told that a beautiful and wealthy girl is in love with him, even if the love is not returned. "Sir, you must be mistaken. It is only that we are cousins—old companions, and that Edna was mine," he said doubtfully.

"My boy, I am *not* deceived. I do believe the girl is as much upset and fretting on your account as for her sister. Why should you not make her happy, be consoled yourself, and enjoy the fortune and comforts that I planned for you so long?"

"Father, *she* is so recently gone, and—she is my only love," said Cyril, sadly. "I can never, never know love more."

"Perhaps not; but you can feel affection—you can think of Edna just as tenderly when betrothed and married to her sister. Why be so resolved on misery before you are twenty-five? Be advised. Think of it, my boy, whatever you may decide; and watch the poor girl if you doubt my statement as to her love for you."

Cyril made no answer; but there was

not exactly a refusal either in his looks or gestures; and Mr. Elmore was content.

It was on the very evening of the day when this conversation had occurred that Cyril saw from the window of the dining-room Gabrielle's graceful figure pacing the verandah, with the slow step and dreamy air that had become habitual to her of late, and which gave her, perhaps, something of the character of Edna to what had been hitherto so brilliant and so haughty a mien. She looked desolate and lonely as she took those measured, languid steps; her head was bent on the ground, now suddenly turned, as if in fear of some expected and unwelcome apparition. It was scarcely in any man's nature not to feel a warm and tender interest and admiration for so lovely and nearly connected a mourner; and Cyril hastily left the room where he had been sitting, and approached the girl with quiet and unobserved steps, till he came close to her.

"Gabrielle!" he said softly.

She turned round quickly, with a suppressed scream, and a look of sudden terror that touched as well as astonished her cousin.

"What is it, dearest?" he said, involuntarily passing his arm round her waist, to support her trembling frame.

"Oh, I do not know. I am so foolish and so weak now that everything frightens me," she said, her figure literally shuddering in his clasp.

"But it is not right—it is not safe, my dear Gabrielle," he said gently. "You must make an effort for all our sakes—for my sake. Think how I must suffer; and it increases my grief to see you thus."

Her head fell on his shoulder, and tears rained down her cheeks with an irrepressible flow. "Do not stop me—let me cry!" she said. "You little know what a relief it is; my very brain burns sometimes with my grief. Oh, Cyril, it is so sweet to think you do care a little for me!" she went on, her proud head still resting helplessly on his shoulder.

It was a mute appeal that he could not resist. To see that trembling, pale, yet most beautiful girl, the sister of her he had so loved and mourned, and not only sharing the same sorrow as his, but evidently looking to him with an ill-concealed love and dependence, was more than man's nature could well stand.

"Ah, Gabrielle," he said, "who have I to care for except you now? Do you doubt that you are dearer to me than any other human being now that Edna is gone?"

She still trembled, and wept with spasmodic violence as he spoke. "She is

blessed to be so loved and mourned," she murmured. "I could almost wish to change with her when I see how you loved her."

"And so will you be loved, no doubt," he said, trying perhaps to mistake her meaning; "you are as richly endowed, ay, and in some respects more so than my lost darling."

"No, no, no!" she cried vehemently. "Never. I do not care for any love that I might win—only you—only you!" And a gasping sob choked her utterance.

He hesitated. The strong, deep passion he had cherished and still felt for Edna—the grief which was struggling for mastery in his breast, and which swallowed up all other interests and aims in life, conspired to make any idea of another love perfectly repugnant to his feelings. But if there could be any soothing element in the prospect, it was the idea of securing for life the companionship and the sympathy of Edna's sister, and his own long companion in his father's home. She could sympathise with him in his regrets; she could recall all the sweet memories of the past with loving vividness. He should have the consolation and the companionship of a loving wife, without the galling restraints that would have marked the feelings and the manners of a stranger to his first betrothed.

All this flashed through his brain as he held the agitated Gabrielle in his support, and recalled his father's earnest appeal of the morning. Why should he not make happy these two dearest to him on earth now that *she* was gone, even at the expense of his own inclinations and happiness?

"Gabrielle," he said falteringly, "dare I be vain enough to read your words and looks aright? May I believe that you could accept the poor remains of a shattered heart—that you could care for my desolate self, dear girl?"

She did not reply, but the thrill that ran through her frame was answer enough.

"Think what you are doing, dear Gabrielle," he went on. "I would not have you repent when too late the sacrifice you have made. Why should you throw away your fresh love on the poor burnt-out ashes of mine? You know all. Think ere you accept it, my Gabrielle."

It was no very alluring wooing, but still it was a flattering compliment to offer and to woo at all. Gabrielle knew that Cyril had well-nigh worshipped her lost sister. Yet he could think of her as a wife, even in the newness of his sorrow. It was no wonder if she thought that he must feel some strong attraction towards her that might take in time the form and warmth of love.

"Cyril, if I thought I could console you

and make you happy—" she said at length.

"You can, you can," he returned, more warmly, as he listened to the gentle, apologetic, almost humble tones, and saw the joy that flashed through her tears like sunshine through a summer shower. "You are the only woman I could ever marry, Gabrielle, and I will try to make you happy if you will commit yourself to me, my dearest cousin."

Gabrielle missed the lover-like tone, the eager warmth that should mark such words; but she worshipped too recklessly, she had dared too desperately for her to hesitate now; and she would win the love she craved, or— Well, the alternative did not even present itself to her mind at that moment.

It was done at last. She was the heiress of thousands; she was the chosen of the man she adored. Was she happy? Only her own heart could tell.

But Mr. Elmore was beyond measure gratified at this prompt, unlooked-for summation of his hopes and wishes. "The best thing we can do is to return home without delay," he said, "and let the marriage take place as soon as possible. Indeed, it can excite no surprise or scandal, because the hopes and plans we before cherished were not known. No one will be aware that Gabrielle is not your first choice, my boy; and besides, it will be better now than later. Occupy yourself with Gabrielle, with your new home, your new fortune; and that will in time cure your grief."

Cyril was, perhaps, indifferent to all since his second betrothal. It was as if the worst were over, and his heart seared and blunted to any aggravation of suffering. He consented without much opposition to the plan; and after a little delay and discussion, it was decided upon as the most eligible.

Gabrielle was, perhaps, the more reluctant of the three. "It will be a terrible trial! You will not be angry if I am rather weak and foolish about it?" she pleaded to her lover.

"I shall love you better for the deep affection it will betray," he said tenderly. "We shall grieve together, and comfort each other, my dear one."

The journey home was begun and ended with little interruption and very few drawbacks on its speed and its success.

Again on the Cornish coast; again at Eothen. Oh, what sad memories rushed upon the minds of the wanderers! but they bravely crushed them back, and

occupied themselves in preparing for the coming wedding.

"It will be but a sad affair, I reckon," said *William Howell*. "Poor Miss Edna cannot be forgotten. Dear, dear! I can see her as plain, poor thing! as she used to walk about with Mr. Cyril on the sands. She was very timid, I know; but then she had not been used to our coast, and it was no wonder."

"Ah, it was a bad omen, I take it," said his wife, shaking her head. "No doubt she had an idea that she should find her death there. They do say that folks often know beforehand. But I am sure I do wonder Mr. Cyril can get married so soon! Why, it's enough to raise her very ghost!" she went on, indignantly.

"Hush, wife, hush! don't talk so; it's not wise. I often have thought I might see the poor dear young lady as I row along the coast, or go with strangers to show them the caves, and it's ill talking of such things now that the wedding is at hand."

Gabrielle, perhaps, had some such terror in her mind, for she never could be induced to go alone to the scene where it was presumed Edna had met her death. "Do not ask it! I cannot!" she gasped, when Cyril gently urged the necessity for such exertion.

"My love, it is at least equally painful for me," he replied; "but we must make the effort, if we are to live in the neighbourhood of the sad catastrophe. For my sake, Gabrielle, do it," he went on, with a slight shade of reproach in his tone, that had perhaps a greater force and effect than he imagined.

"It shall be as you will, Cyril. I would do anything for you," she said. "In time I shall get stronger; but—not yet—not yet."

"Perhaps you will when all is over—when you are mine—really mine!" he said, gently.

"Yes, yes, perhaps—nay, I am sure. It will be safe then, quite safe, will it not, Cyril?"

"Scarcely more than now, dearest," he said. "However, it will not be long. It is only a brief week or two before we shall be united for ever, my Gabrielle. Now make a brave effort, and come," he added, impelling her forward with gentle violence.

She obeyed mechanically, but her hand clung to his arm with involuntary, and, as it seemed, irresistible dependence; and had it not been that he believed it the effect of over-strained nerves and devoted affection to the lost one, he might have despised the weakness it betrayed.

On they went, slowly and sadly, as they trod what they believed must have been the scene of Edna's last agony and death. Not a word was spoken. Cyril was picturing to himself the last moments and terror of the unhappy and beloved one. And Gabrielle? Well, she alone could know what were the feelings which filled her breast and weakened the very power of her limbs to fulfil their office.

At length they reached the last bay before turning to the Porth Caves, and Gabrielle stopped gaspingly, as if unable to go farther. Suddenly, as she stood still and motionless for a brief moment to collect her strength, she gazed wildly around, as if she heard some approaching footstep, and then gave a quick, sharp shriek that resounded in the silence with painful shrillness.

"My love! my poor Gabrielle! what is the matter?" said Cyril, soothingly caressing her.

"Oh, Cyril, I saw her! She is there! Oh, save me! save me! Why should she come back to haunt me?" she cried in agony.

"My darling, do not give way to such weak fears and fancies!" he said, firmly. "It is a mere nervous terror. It is simply impossible; and if it were so, why should you be alarmed at such an apparition?"

"Cyril, she might be angry, resentful—at—at—our relations to each other," she faltered.

"No, no, Gabrielle; not so. There was no envy or jealousy in her pure heart. She loved you and me too well not to rejoice in our happiness; and she knew that no one could console me as her sister could—a memorial of her, who will mourn her through life," he went on enthusiastically.

"Ah, Cyril, how you loved her!" groaned Gabrielle, drawing away from his arm in shivering jealousy and pain.

"Yes; and you knew it when you accepted my shattered heart. It is no new debt to you, my love. I do—yes, and for ever. I shall love her memory; but that does not affect my feelings to you. I will always be a kind and affectionate husband to you so long as we both live."

Gabrielle's lips curled bitterly. The words "ashes in the mouth" rose to her tongue. Then the old tremor overcame the jealous feeling, and she leaned on his breast, and laid her head on his shoulder, as if she desired nothing more than the fate that he painted would be hers. But a strange change came over her mood after that. She suddenly drew up her slight figure, her gait and bearing strengthened to their usual firmness; and she walked

home by Cyril's side with some of her old haughty air, and her voice had some of the ring of its old tones.

If her heart could be read, it would perhaps have had printed on it the feeling, if not the words, "Shall Edna triumph even in death?"

#### CHAPTER IV.

**T**HE days had passed, and the bridal-day was on the point of dawning as the morn of a new and eventful life for the young pair; but what would be its noon and its eventide was indeed a problem not to be easily solved. Gabrielle would, of course, put off her mourning for the day, and change her sable dress for the pure white that became a bride; and the robe was certainly worthy at once of the beauty and the wealth of the wearer. The richest and softest white satin, covered with exquisite lace, the bouquets of natural flowers, and the pearl and diamond ornaments that secured the veil, and sparkled on the neck and arms of the beautiful bride, were simply dazzling in their effect, and even Cyril almost started as the fair vision was led up to the altar by his father.

Perhaps she looked too queenly, too brilliant in her loveliness. In any case she was herself again — herself as she had once been, and as opposed to the soft, gentle creature who ought to have stood in her place at his side. And so, it might be, thought others also. The little crowd of villagers and domestics who thronged the church-doors commented freely on the bride as she stepped from the carriage and walked into the church.

"She's not like Miss Edna, handsome as she is," said one excellent hard-working woman whom Edna had befriended. "No; and it's a wonder to me why he marries her."

"Then this is not the lady he was to marry, is it?" asked a man, evidently a stranger to the place, and on whose arm leaned a female, apparently a great invalid, for she was closely wrapped up, and she clung for support to her companion, as if unable to trust to the strength of her own limbs.

Mrs. Daniels surveyed him with a sort of pitying contempt. "Dear me; no. Why, he was going to have her sister. She was the eldest and the richest, but people say this is the handsomest," was her reply. "But she was drowned, poor thing, and now the sister has got her fortune and her husband that was to be. Hush, here she comes!"

In the little bustle that attended the

bride's advent, the stranger and his charge changed places from the entrance to a post near to the altar, though still modestly concealed from view. In truth, attention was so engrossed by the lovely and brilliant Gabrielle that there was little to spare for obscure strangers; and in a few brief moments the service that was to join irreversibly the hands of the betrothed cousins began.

There was evident agitation on both sides. Even Cyril's voice was not so clear and firm as should be the case with a happy bridegroom, and Gabrielle's was simply hoarse with the emotion that was so foreign to her temperament. But the service went on to the important part where the ring is put on the finger, and the words spoken that concludes the part where man and wife are united in the sight of the church, and of man, and of the Almighty author of the marriage state.

Gabrielle's hand shook violently as Cyril took it in his, and it was with difficulty that he could pass the magic circlet on the small finger. Even as he did so, Gabrielle raised the long lashes from her downcast eyes for an instant. A wild expression came into their brilliant depths as she glanced shyly around. She was once more seized with one of the violent fits of shivering that had before come over her soon after Edna's death. Then, as she literally tottered with weak and nervous emotion, her lips parted, a shrill, yet suppressed, scream escaped them, and with a "Save me! save me!" she fell into Cyril's outstretched arms.

All was terror and confusion. Cyril hastily carried the form of his bride into the vestry, close at hand; restoratives were quickly procured and applied to the sufferer, but it was long ere they had the desired effect. Gabrielle was so hysterically agitated, there was such an agony of distress in her looks, and tones, and gestures, that her illness was by no means within the reach of ordinary remedies.

In some quarter-of-an-hour or so she was able to be conveyed to the carriage in waiting, supported by the bridegroom and his father, after the little crowd had been sent away. But no sooner had she reached her room than a doctor was thought necessary to be sent for, to calm the strange, wild agitation that shook her.

"Poor thing!" said Mr. Elmore to his son. "It is evidently the painful memory of the past that so upsets her. You must love her all the better for the deep feeling she displays; but it must be checked, and no one is better able to do it than Dr. Barker."

The physician, however, when he arrived, was not so immediately successful as might have been expected. He pronounced the evil even more deeply seated than was apparent to the eyes of inexperienced observers.

"The nerves have had a terrible shake, there is no doubt," he remarked; "and one that has probably been intensified and renewed by Mrs. Elmore's return to the scene of her great shock. It will need the greatest patience on the part of her newly made husband to treat the case as it needs. She must be kept at once quiet and cheerful—controlled, but not with any harshness, from the indulgence of these paroxysms; and with youth and happiness on her side, there is great hope that she may recover from the malady."

To an unprejudiced person this bore rather the form of judicious counsel where an unsound and diseased mind was in question. It was a terrible prospect for the new-made bridegroom, on his wedding-day, to think that such would be his duty to his young and beautiful wife; and it might be that Cyril felt as if a retribution had overtaken him for his unfaithfulness to his dead one's memory. Yet his conscience acquitted him there. He felt that Edna was his first and his only real love—that any other woman would receive but a calm, cold affection from him. He had married to make the happiness of those dearest to him left on earth. His conscience, perhaps, was clear, but it was a dreary prospect with the afflicted wife he had taken to himself.

A suffering bride, a saddened bridegroom, a subdued, panic-stricken household—such were the surroundings of Cyril and Gabrielle's wedding-day as it drew to its close.

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"Then you are determined, my child? You will not listen to any remonstrance on my part, my dear Hyfrid?" said a kindly looking elderly man, as he sat quietly smoking his pipe at a homely but exceedingly pretty cottage-door, and by his side a gentle, pensive girl, almost too refined for the humble dress she wore and the aspect of her presumed father.

"Yes, quite resolved," she said. "I must work. I neither can nor will do anything else. My mind is fully made up—especially now," she added firmly.

"Well, the only thing is that if you will not take my advice, and if you will cast away from you all your sheet-anchors, I confess I do not see much else for it. Of course I could and would willingly keep you with me; and my cottage will look very

dreary when you are gone; but then I am not young, and I have nothing, or next to nothing, to leave behind me, and it would be cruel for me to keep you if I could, and then leave you destitute. The plan you have formed is, perhaps, no bad one if I can manage it for you; but it will give you a sea-voyage again, unless I heard of anything of the sort before we went, or I had more money to give you."

"You mean that I should go abroad with you," she said, "in your vessel?"

"Yes, if you can rough it, my dear," he said.

"It will do me good, it keeps me from thinking," she said quickly. "I will go, if you will take me, and—what then?

"Why, if you have set your heart on going abroad, and you want a situation there, it will be the easiest way to manage it, only you will be lonely, my dear, away from all you know," he went on.

"It is the only place in which I can endure life away from—every one," she said impatiently. "Oh, if I could forget the past for ever as I can leave this country behind!"

The old man knew but too well all the uselessness of consolation, and he turned the conversation on the circumstances and plans for their impending journey rather than more depressing and sentimental subjects.

It was a rough life for a delicate girl, to occupy a berth and share the fare of a boat; but the kindly owner did his best to smooth its hardships, and Hyfrid was little occupied by personal discomforts. Thus the passage to the sunny Italian shores was accomplished without any complaints or dangers, and the fair young passenger duly landed with the other "cargo" of Mr. Radford's vessel.

It was, however, some time before she obtained the employment which she desired. She wanted to teach music and English in the foreign land, where both might be needed for its inhabitants. She had herself studied music under an Italian master in former days, and she knew that she had at least sufficient knowledge of it, even in the land of song, to be acceptable as a companion or teacher to young children; but for some time there seemed little hope of obtaining the situation without recommendation or reference; but when almost in despair success came to the much-enduring girl.

"My dear child, I have good news for you," said the Captain, entering the room of their lodging one afternoon, after a long absence. "I have seen Dr. Lemini, who has once attended me in an illness I had here,

and who is a very kind, good sort of man for a foreigner ; and he has promised me to take you as a governess to his little girl, for awhile, at any rate ; and then if you please him, he would give you references, I am sure. So as I cannot stop here much longer, it seemed a very good thing, I thought."

Hyfrid was only too thankful to hear this news, even though it cost a pang to part with her kindly adopted father ; but it was a necessity, and when she had been presented to her new patron, and the graceful child who was to be her charge, she felt at any rate the position was the least irksome that she could imagine in her circumstances.

"Good-bye, my dear child ; I shall be here again in two or three months. I fancy I have done pretty well this time, and I don't think I shall try a long voyage any more. I am getting too old to go coasting about now. But you found it was not so bad for the constitution in your case, my dear. Why, it saved your life, I do believe."

"Yes, if that is any boon," said the girl, sadly ; "but I am very ungrateful to say so to you, my kind friend. I shall indeed be pleased to see your face again."

Hyfrid Grey took up her abode at her Italian home with that intense feeling of hopeless resignation to a joyless life that at least gives composure, if not happiness. She had known a far different life ; she had tasted the bright and bubbling cup of youth, and joy, and love. Now all was gone ; but she had learned to master herself, and to find peace in duty and in self-sacrifice.

The little Beatrice was a source of interest and amusement to her weary spirit. The child attached herself to her, and, though delicate, and petted as a consequence, she yet willingly submitted to her fair young governess, and clung to her as her chosen and favourite refuge from every childish trouble and suffering. It was well for Hyfrid that it was so, and that her sympathies and energies were thus called upon by her young charge. It gave her a sense of usefulness, and the feeling that some one loved her and clung to her in the world. Besides which, the father showed as keen, if more restrained, a sense of gratitude and confidence with his child ; and the young English governess became an honoured and welcome authority in all that concerned the welfare of the little Beatrice.

Still, it had its cares and drawbacks, had that responsible position. Beatrice, always delicate, betrayed symptoms of the fever that is so fatal in her country ere Hyfrid

had been more than three months installed as her governess ; and as a natural consequence the native servants fled from the infection of a sick-room, and left the brave English girl to watch over the little sufferer. She did not shrink from the danger or the fatigue.

"Are you not afraid, signora ?" asked the doctor, when the disease had declared itself. "I will not oblige nor even allow you to stay if you are."

"No, not in the least. I do not so value life," she said ; "and there will be no one to miss me. Let me stay. It will be a comfort to be of use."

She kept her word. Night and day she watched over the little girl till her danger was over ; and then, for a time, her strength and courage failed, and she broke down so completely that the doctor peremptorily ordered her from the sick-bed of his child.

"I cannot lose—I cannot sacrifice you, even for her," he said, with such an uncontrolled touch of tenderness that Hyfrid, even in her utter prostration of strength, shrank from the new danger that she only too clearly perceived might await her. But in truth she was too utterly sunk in powerless weakness of mind and body to be able to resist the decided verdict as to her treatment in the crisis. She was carefully placed in the bed to which she had long been a stranger, and restoratives administered by the hand or under the superintendence of the doctor himself ; and for at least three days the veto was preserved as to her slightest exertions of either physical or mental powers.

This care, perhaps, saved her from an attack of serious illness ; and she could not be utterly insensible to the grateful regard that was displayed in the anxiety and the unselfish devotion of one who was a comparative stranger to her. Perhaps she had scarcely bestowed much thought on the character or the demeanour of her employer till then. The office she had undertaken had completely engrossed her thoughts and attention ; and in truth there were far too painful and terrible memories in her heart to allow of any visions or fancies of love and happiness. These never again could be hers. No, never again. All was over for the young exile from her home and her land ; and all she wished for now was peace and safety in the remainder of her life.

Thus, as she regained strength, the uneasy fears as to the meaning of those tender words, that loving care, bore more anxiously on her mind, till she dreaded her first interview with her host and patron, lest her fears should be realised and her

refuge gone. Perhaps she delayed it as long as possible, on pretext of languor and need of repose ; but it came at last. Dr. Lemini, without ceremony or announcement, quietly walked into her room on the fourth day after her attack, and sat down by the sofa on which she was half reclining, looking, perhaps, more winningly lovely for the temporary depression of her powers, and the exquisite delicacy that it had spread over her whole features and transparent skin.

Victor Lemini was probably more susceptible to such charms, accustomed as he was to the dark skin and black raven hair of his countrywomen; and his Southern nature yielded to the passionate admiration they excited. "You are better, dearest signora?" he said, in his liquid tones. "Thank God that it is so! I could scarcely have thought such a price could be paid even for my child's life."

Hyfrid looked almost reproachfully at him. "A father can scarcely have such an idea," she said. "How could you have borne to lose such a treasure as your only child?"

"I am not quite so selfishly brutal," he said, "as to wish your young life to have been lost even for my Beatrice. Hyfrid, can you not imagine that there are affections which are more engrossing and more overpowering than even the love of a father? Have you never loved? Can you comprehend what that feeling is?"

The girl shuddered at the idea—the very name of love. She had suffered only too much, she had been too sorely distressed from that one passion, not to dread its name; and Victor Lemini saw with a strange and curious surprise the emotion thus excited.

"I need ask no more," he said—"no more. Nor do I wish to pry into your secrets, dear one; but I cannot conceal my own. Hyfrid, I do love you. Yes, with all my heart, with a stronger, tenderer passion than I experienced even for the mother of my Beatrice. Our union was one arranged for us in our youth; but you have won my heart; you have captivated all my senses; you have deserved my gratitude and my reverence by your noble self-devotion; you have given me my child back to life. Will you not add to the blessing by giving me your priceless self?"

Hyfrid had listened to, or rather endured, this long, passionate outpouring without any hindrance. She was too weak, and, it might be, too much taken by surprise to answer at once. She had perhaps thought that such ideas were in Victor Lemini's heart, but not that they would

be so soon and so suddenly vented in words. But when he tried to take her hand in his, and to draw nearer to her, as she half-lay, half-sat on the-pillowed couch prepared for her, she woke up, as it were, to a sense of the situation.

"No, no; do not ask it—do not think of it. It is impossible!" she murmured.

His brow contracted with a gust of passion. "Do you mean that you are engaged to another?—that you have come here with that bond, that tie, and never told me? Hyfrid, it was wrong—cruel! I could not have believed it of you," he said passionately.

She shook her head mournfully. "No, I am not. I never shall be," she said. "I shall never marry—never!"

"Why?" he said sharply. "Perhaps this same favoured one will come back to you again. That is what you are waiting for, I suppose?"

"No," she said calmly, "no; he is married."

Victor's face relaxed. At least the jealousy of his Southern nature was appeased by that admission. "Then I shall hope still. You will learn to love me in time," he said; "and at least a home with me would be very different to a life of dependence and toil. My angel!" he burst out vehemently, as her lovely eyes turned upon him with a deprecating look, "I cannot, I will not, part with you. You must be mine. I cannot live without you!" And he would have snatched once more the hand she had drawn away from him, but she resolutely kept it from his clasp.

"It is selfish, unmanly, Dr. Lemini, to take advantage of my weak helplessness thus," she said, with a dignity that he had never before seen in her. "Hear me for a moment, and then you shall have no further chance of distressing me. I tell you once again that love and marriage are over for me for ever. I hate, I loathe their very idea, their very name. Nothing shall induce me to think for one moment of any man. I would die sooner," she added vehemently; "it would kill me." There was no mistaking the sincerity of her look and tone, and the flush that came on the delicate cheek warned the physician that it would not be safe to press the subject further at that moment.

"Well, we will not speak more of it just now," he said. "You must remain here for another day, and then if you are better you shall return to Beatrice. She is pining for you. Ah, how she would rejoice if she could have you for ever!" he went on, softly. "I will still hope, Hyfrid," and he left the room, after gently arranging the

pillows of the couch for her comfort and rest.

### CHAPTER V.

**H**YFRID Grey could not find repose after that agitating scene. She felt that her home was gone once more. Young and inexperienced as she was, she could see enough in the passionate Italian's nature to warn her that it was an impossibility for her to remain in his house, except as his wife ; and a wife she never would be—that she had vowed long since. As she had said, she had suffered too terribly to endure the very idea.

However, she gave herself up at last to the quietude of despair. She had no friend in that foreign land, and she could not return to her own country. The grave appeared to be her only refuge, and she resigned herself to the hope that it might soon receive her in its friendly home.

There is a wonderful power, however, in the buoyancy of early youth ; and the invalid at length cast off the fears of the dreary prospect before her, and allowed herself to fall into a dreamy weariness that was somewhat like sleep. She was roused at last by an unwonted bustle in the house, which, like all the ancient dwellings of the better classes, was too spacious for any noise to be heard from one part to the other. A sudden alarm seized her that Beatrice might be worse from some unlooked-for relapse, and had she been stronger, or had the recent scene that had so agitated her not occurred, she would have hurried to her room ; but the faintness from which she had been suffering warned her not to attempt the exertion, and she remained in listening suspense till the attendant who waited on her appeared.

"What was it I heard just now?" she asked, eagerly. "Is the signorita worse?"

"Oh, no, signora ; but some invalid come for a little time. You know the doctor has some patients in his house ; only that part is divided from this. He would not have so large a house but for that. It was a palazzo once, you know, signora." And then the servant proceeded to lay the refreshments she had brought before the invalid, as if she did not wish to hear or answer any further questions as to the late excitement in the dwelling.

In good truth, Hyfrid had other and more engrossing thoughts to occupy her than any merely extraneous and indifferent occurrence ; and ere long she had utterly forgotten the temporary disturbance in the usually peaceful mansion. The rest of the

day she was left in peace ; and when on the following morning she rose, with the intention of resuming her duties with her young charge, she had a note put in her hand, in a writing that was unfamiliar to her, but which she guessed to be that of Victor Lemini. The cramped, foreign hand, the Italian tongue in which it was couched, were enough to decide the authorship ; and she opened it with fear and trembling as to its contents. It ran thus :—

"I am unable to come to you to-day, my heart's idol, for other and less pleasing duties draw me to another, who is even more helpless and urgent in her necessities than yourself. But in the interval, and in her sick-room, I write these lines to you, with whom is my whole heart, to urge more fully my earnest prayer and desire than the agitation that shook us both would permit. Hyfrid, have you utterly forgotten that you would be penniless and friendless if you left my house? Your character would be gone, from the very fact of you having lived alone here, and then left in anger and disgrace. No one knows you to vindicate your fame. It is enough that you were willing to take my situation without protection from your own sex ; and what will become of you then, my lovely one? Where can you go, what will you do, in such a strait? Be content, my Hyfrid—accept my love, my home, my tender care. I am an Italian ; my passions are as vehement one way as the other. I can hate as well as love—revenge as well as worship. You may fear me one day, if you do not care to love me now. Think ere it is too late. I give you a week to consider. Look at my Beatrice ; regard all around you. Is it not best to be surrounded by love and luxury than by sorrow and solitude, even if you do not feel all the passion you once did for another? That will come in time. It must respond to my passionate love. I will take no denial. You must—you shall be my wife—my all—the mother of my Beatrice."

"VICTOR LEMINI."

Hyfrid read this effusion with a bitter sense of degradation and misery. Was it not enough that she had to embrace the best and only way of gaining her living, but she must be reproached and threatened as if she had been a guilty thing? What was she to do? Was she to throw up her livelihood, her fame and character, and everything that was dear to her, for the sake of her love? or was she to console herself with the young daughter of the physician as a compensation for all that she was enduring, and, crushing back her instincts and feelings, spend her life in striving to forget the past and endure the present?

"Only for the sake of one," she thought, "only for the sake of one could I do it, if I thought that it would serve the happiness of others and save myself from remorse. I have yet some time to think. I must see, I must see! Oh, my God! direct me in my straits! Help me to choose the right for

others since I can never more know happiness myself," and then she nerved herself to partake of the tempting breakfast brought to her, and determined to attempt the return to the old duties that were now *so precarious in their duration*.

*If anything could have reconciled her to the present and given strength for the future it was the delight of the little invalid at her return to her side. "I have been so unhappy. I could not eat. I have never felt once at home and at peace till you came. I feel as if I could not live if you left me. I could lie down and die."* And the impetuous Italian child threw her arms round the neck of her governess, and laid her head on her shoulder, as if to figure out the scene.

It was not assumed ; it was too spontaneous and vehement for superficial acting. Hyfrid knew it, and once more a pang darted through her at the idea of that dreary, constrained future which seemed to be closing round her. She had been cruelly dealt with in past days—the victim of jealous revenge. Now she would receive equal punishment from love or its prototype passion—hate. "Was the motive sufficient?" once more she said to herself. "Wait ; there is time ; I will at least be at peace for the brief respite allowed to me."

Either from necessity or accident, the doctor was prevented from resuming his diurnal visits to his governess and his child. He was busy. There was some one very ill, and he could not leave them, was the account given of his absence. Hyfrid was thankful—most thankful ; but she still felt as if the clouds were gathering in intensity from the delay in their bursting on her head, and waited in fear and trembling the result.

Thus three or four days passed on, and a brief note, containing but two or three lines, was placed in her hand, to warn her that the doctor would be free to visit her on the following day.

"I have been so entirely occupied, my dear one," the letter began, "with a new patient that all my old ones have gone unvisited until to-day. I shall bring up all these arrears with as little delay as possible, and then devote myself to my chief, my only interest in life. To-morrow I shall ask you for an answer to the one life-question that I put to you. Again I say beware—I will not be trifled with. But if you are wise, you will find I will never change to you—my Hyfrid—my heart's idol !—Yours, VICTOR."

She read it again and again, but she could come to no further conclusion than had hitherto been perplexing her. Her whole nature revolted from the one course —her vow had been made, if only mentally, that she would never be another's.

Yet, if not, there was an almost fatal future before her, for herself and for others who might be affected by her decision.

Her night was troubled, and she slept longer in the morning than was her wont, and her toilette was a somewhat hurried one, lest she might not be prepared to receive her dreaded visitor. She had not quite finished, her dress was not fully arranged, and her beautiful hair was floating over her shoulders in graceful confusion, when she heard steps approaching the room. Could it be the doctor at that hour? She could scarcely credit that he would thus intrude on her privacy ere she had prepared to receive him, all accustomed as he might be to the freedom of sick-rooms.

She was just at the door, her hand on the handle, ready to resist any such entrance, when it slowly and gently opened, and a figure—a female figure—entered—a figure that she knew full well. It was one that she had never wished to see more—one that was associated with the most terrible incidents of her life ; and now, when she gazed upon it in a stupor of terror which forbade any expression in speech, she felt as if she had a sort of nightmare on her that prevented her moving from the spot.

Yet that figure was young and beautiful, although the eyes were too bright and wild for perfect loveliness, and the movements were graceful and ladylike ; but Hyfrid knew her to be a beautiful and unscrupulous fiend, and dreaded her as such.

The lady gazed at Hyfrid as if she too was in a dream. "Where am I? Who are you?" she said, in a dreamy voice that made Hyfrid thrill with terror.

"You are in the house of Dr. Lemini. I am his governess," said the girl, with constrained composure. "I suppose you have lost your way. Let me ring for a servant to take you back."

"No! no! no!" exclaimed the visitor, hurriedly. "I will not go back. I will stay with you. Only—I seem to know you ; and yet I am not sure," she went on, with a shudder.

"It is not likely ; you must go to your own apartments, madame," returned the girl ; "you cannot stay here ; it is *my* room. I am not allowed to have any visitors," she added, controlling with a powerful effort the alarm and agonised memories that rushed on her.

Still those eyes were fixed on her with a menacing air that gradually intensified. "Do not move—do not ring the bell ; I want to talk," she said defiantly. "Who are you? It cannot be—her. She is

dead—dead!" she went on, in a sort of desperate wail.

"Would you wish she were alive?" asked the girl, suddenly.

"I could not bear it. We could not both live," said the visitor. "My brain turns even to think of it. Either she must die or I—unless—unless—"

"Unless what?" asked Hyfrid.

"Unless she were married; and yet that would not do. No, no; she would have all then, and that made me frantic; and it was just, just!" she went on, passionately.

Hyfrid's lips quivered. "If this person whom you hate and fear were married and gave up all, would you forgive her then?" she asked doubtfully.

"Perhaps, if I were sure."

"And would it make you well again."

"Yes, yes, it would. I could sleep then, be at peace; and so would he. Now it is dreadful. I cannot sleep—I see her so often; and I dare not say so, because that would tell all—all!"

Hyfrid shuddered. It was fearful to see that wreck of what had once been so splendidly beautiful. "Why do you wish this marriage?" she said.

"Because he could not think of nor love her then; and I sometimes think he does so still, and then I hate him, though I love him so much, and I feel as if I had rather he were dead also," she said, listening eagerly, with the sharp sense of mental derangement, for sonic distant sounds.

Hyfrid was white as the peignoir she wore at the words. Whether true or not, whether the wild ravings of the unfortunate woman were in the least founded on the real and fixed condition of her mind, the mood was a cruel and a bitter—nay, a fiendish one. At the very moment, however, steps came in hearing, and Hyfrid felt a sensation of relief from her perilous situation as they approached. But now the stranger's mood took a new turn, ere the door opened and a figure appeared, whom the girl perceived, with mingled surprise and alarm, was the doctor himself.

"How came you here, dear madame?" he said, his manner blending the mixture of coaxing and decision that is necessary in dealing with the insane. "You have missed your way."

"No, I have not. I shall stay here, or else the girl will go with me," said the patient, resolutely, placing herself firmly in the recess of the couch, whence nothing but force could remove her.

Victor Lemini looked anxiously troubled

at Hyfrid, who was thus selected as a victim by the caprice of his patient. "Will you go?" he said, in a low tone. "I will take care that you shall soon come away; but I fear she will not give up the fancy."

Hyfrid bowed assent. The doctor could little imagine what was the amount of the effort he asked. He little guessed that the woman he loved was the object of the patient's virulent hate and jealousy; but still he guarded her as he would his own life, as he prepared to lead the patient from the room.

"Will you promise she shall stay? I want her," said the lady, resolutely.

"She shall stay a short time. You know she cannot be spared long. She is governess to my daughter, and the child has been ill. She must go back to her." There was a dark frown on the lady's face which betrayed anything but submission to the fiat; but she did not reply, and the three proceeded to her apartments in the other part of the building.

The patient quickly placed herself between Hyfrid and the door of the room. "You shall not go yet," she said. "I like to look at you. It is like my childhood to see you. It cannot be the same, of course," she repeated, "for she is dead—dead! Still, it brings back her face and her voice," she went on. "Oh, if she had died then—but hush! hush! I must not tell; there is nothing—nothing—I know nothing; and—and—if she were alive, she must be married, or—or—" And a malignant glance at Hyfrid proved that by some perversion she had mixed up her image with the object of her hatred and revenge.

Victor Lemini was expert in such things. He read the glance aright, and his quick mind jumped at the facts, albeit he might still draw imperfect conclusions from them. "My dear lady, you know that this young girl is about to be married, so of course she has nothing to do with the one you were speaking of."

The lady gave a cry of joy. There seemed a confusion in her diseased brain between Hyfrid and the deceased object of her vengeance. "Whom will she marry? when?" she asked.

"She is to be my wife, and I hope in less than a month," returned Victor, eagerly looking at Hyfrid's flushed face.

"Is it so? Tell me," said the lady, fiercely, turning to the girl. "Is it true?"

It was a perplexing situation. There was something menacing in the expression of that beautiful face, which showed that it would be dangerous to irritate her.

"Say yes, or she will never leave you

alone," whispered Victor, in a low, rapid tone ; and the girl, albeit she considered it as a mere farce, hesitatingly pronounced the hateful monosyllable.

"And it must be so. You will be married, and then I shall be happy and get well, and he, my husband, will be so pleased. He does love me ; he says I am all the world to him now," she went on joyously.

Hyfrid turned sharply away. She could bear no more ; and with a sudden spring towards the door, she left the room.

"It does not signify—no—no—if she is to be your wife," said the patient.

"Why do you wish it? Do you know her?" asked Victor, quickly.

"I do not know. Sometimes I think so. It is like a mist. She changes, you know. She brings some one back to me, only she is dead ; and that makes me hate her, unless she were married. If she—I mean if the one she is so like had been married, I should not be ill, you know, nor *he*, poor fellow ! so sad. And I do love, I worship him ; I have sinned for him," she murmured, bursting into a passion of violent sobs and tears. "And now—I am wretched, and so is he ; and all because she was not married. I will not have any one near me who is not married," she, went on, angrily. "Then I should be quite well, and—my husband also happy."

"She will marry me—she has said it. Be quiet—be at peace," said the doctor, gently. "I pledge my word you shall never be troubled with her more."

The sufferer seemed to find peace in the assurance. She sat down on the fauteuil the doctor placed for her, and then for the moment the hallucinations passed away, and she conversed on ordinary topics, and replied to his questions about her health with tolerable sense and composure ; and Dr. Lemini left her, after a brief interview with the attendant maid, which was carefully concealed from the mistress. Later he sought a conversation with his governess which might probably be pregnant of the future fate of the sufferer under his care, and of others who were yet more near and dear to him.

It perhaps decided his course of conduct, for as he left the apartments that were devoted to the invalid his step was more assured and his expression more decided than had yet been since the advent of his patient. He took his way to the room of the young governess, and entered without even waiting for admission. Hyfrid was sitting quietly on a chair, her head concealed by her hands,

which were resting on the table beside her. She languidly raised it at the sound of his voice ; and there was not even the emotion of surprise in the quiet despair of her face.

"What do you want, signor ?" she said, calmly. "Can you not leave me in peace, after all that has taken place? Do you want to kill me ?" she went on, with more vehemence than usually belonged to her.

"No, dearest, no," he said, with unmoved and provoking calmness. "Only I came to tell you that I know—or at least suspect—all ; and I warn you, my darling, that you must complete your work, unless you would run a fearful risk for yourself and for him you have done so much to serve."

Still Hyfrid shrank from the trial that she felt was impending ; she knew that the words she had spoken, with the very fear of death before her eyes, would be brought against her, as a pledge which could not be reclaimed ; she guessed that there would be threats used to confirm and urge its performance.

"Go on. Tell me all you have to say—all that you fancy you know," she said quietly.

"I will, then, in few words. You are the victim of whom that woman speaks. You are the sister she supposes to be dead ; and I tell you as I am a living man, and well versed in these cases, that her recovery, your own safety, and her husband's depend on your carrying out your promise. Once my wife, and her mind will regain its tone, her husband may find rest and happiness, and you will have all that love, and care, and admiring sympathy can give. Now you know what I believe. As a truthful, high-minded woman, I ask you whether you can deny it."

She literally groaned. "I neither deny nor admit it. I will go away. I will hide myself. She cannot have any fear, real or imaginary, then," she said desperately.

"To what avail would that be? You are perfectly aware that she thought you dead when this delusion seized her. She is in the state that you have seen without any wish or intention of mine. Ask yourself what is likely to arise except an increased paroxysm of delirium and despair."

"And you consider it could be cured by seeing me married, under a wild impression that I am this sister ?" said the girl, firmly.

"Yes, I do."

Hyfrid thought deeply and deliberately for a few minutes. "Dr. Lemini," she said, with the strength of a fixed purpose in her manner, "I will not tell you what I believe or suspect ; but one thing I am resolved

on—I will be certain of the use of my sacrifice before I consent to make it. I will take the office on me of tending your patient, and then if, when she believes me to be your future wife, she recovers her coolness and reason, I will do as I gave her to understand, and the cure you predict will be finished. If it is no use, no power shall induce me to make a useless sacrifice and take a hated bondage on myself."

"Am I so hateful to you, Hyfrid?"

"No; only as one who wishes to force me to misery," she said passionately. "I can bear it while alone and free; but not when any regrets would be a danger and a sin."

"This is all you will give?"

"All. I care not what comes. I neither will nor can do more," she exclaimed vehemently. He saw that she was in earnest; he dared not urge her further; and a hope that was founded on experience of such cases made him believe that his wishes would be accomplished.

"It must be as you say, then, if nothing can move you," he said gently. "I am not afraid but that I shall prove in the right. I will not have your precious safety risked, though," he went on, tenderly. "If you are in attendance on her, there shall always be some one to take care that you shall never be exposed to any of her capricious deliriums. A week will suffice to show whether I am in the right," he added, with a smile of triumph. "When shall it begin?"

"I care not. Whenever you appoint," she replied.

"Then let it be to-morrow. You will be strong enough then, and the impressions left by your interview will be more vivid. Are you content?"

"Yes, yes, anything," she said impatiently; "and till then leave me in peace. I can at least claim that at your hands."

He took her hand in his, and triumphantly raised it to his lips. "My wife," he said, "I can at least take this from you. For the rest, it is my first act of love to be submissive to your will." And with a confused but well-satisfied "farewell," he left the apartment.

## CHAPTER VI.

**F**THE ordeal had begun, and was rapidly progressing; and even Hyfrid's slow and reluctant appreciation of what was its result could scarcely deny that the invalid appeared to be gaining composure, if not any actual rational idea of what was around her. She seemed to depend so entirely on the society of the new companion that it was an all-

sufficient argument to threaten her with any deprivation of her company. She would comply with any restrictions, obey any wishes of her doctor or attendants, if only Miss Grey could always be at hand to read to her, sing to her, and perform all the little kindly offices that are necessary to one accustomed to be waited upon as a superior, and have every whim gratified.

Still the old fancy, the old delusion, was ever there present. "You are going to marry Dr. Lemini; you cannot ever marry or wish to marry any one else?" she would say from time to time.

"Never," was the fervent reply. "I will never marry nor wish to marry any one else." And then once more the patient was at rest.

The week was passing on that was to decide the important question; and then Victor voluntarily renewed his promise for a respite. "I will still give you another week," he said. "You can scarcely doubt that my ideas are fast being confirmed by what has taken place. I am well convinced of all I suspected, and I am quite willing to give you one more week, that you may never doubt my true desire you should be satisfied in the sacrifice, which I hope will not turn out to be one," he added, with a well-pleased smile.

The days still glided rapidly away in the same calm course; and the time was fast approaching that would decide Hyfrid's fate. She could scarcely doubt what it must be, unless she cast herself in the very depths of danger, and loneliness, and death.

"It cannot be for long!" she thought, "it cannot be for long! I could not endure it. At least I can serve *him*, if I must myself be miserable. Yes, I will, I will, if I am once certain of the truth; and then I can but die." And the girl's wan, sweet face only too well endorsed her words, as she sat in the temporary solitude of her apartment, and abandoned herself to the luxury of woe—a sad but real consolation for the suffering she had undergone.

"You shall take a holiday, my dearest girl," said Victor, when, after a brief enjoyment of that solitude, he found her gazing sadly on the fair prospect from the window, as if longing to escape, like a caged bird. "I have told your charge that you will not be able to be with her the rest of the day, or perhaps to-morrow. Then all must be settled for the event which will, I believe, restore her reason. It is but a monomania, which is capable of cure."

Hyfrid assented languidly, and then rose from her reclining posture and declared her intention of going out for an hour

or so in the walled garden, which formed a quadrangle round the house, for a cooling *breathe of air and repose*. "At present I must be alone," she said, "quite alone. I will be at my old post again to-morrow. Give me to-day."

It was no very flattering request to a bridegroom-elect; but Victor was experienced enough to bide his time, all-impetuous Southerner that he was; and Hyfrid stepped out of the long glass window and slowly paced the terrace-walks of the garden, secure in the belief that no one could find access, save from the house, or a door that opened on the path outside.

She sat down at length on a seat near to that door, and under some trees that gave a welcome shelter from the burning rays of the sun, and, like Jonah of old, she almost mourned at having been delivered from death almost by a miracle. What a joyless life of constraint was before her as Victor Lemini's wife! And yet there was no alternative if she would not court certain destruction to herself and others. Her thoughts reverted to a far different scene, when loved and loving ones had been at her side, and spoken dear, and tender, and inspiring words of hope and anticipation of a blissful future that, alas! was never to be realised.

How she started! How doubtful she felt whether her senses deceived her, when a glad cry sounded in her ears—a cry of mingled joy and agony, spoken in the same soft, tense tones—the same outpouring of gushing love and tenderness, "Edna!—Edna!—can it be? Oh, can the sea give up its dead?" fell on her ear in unmistakable emotion from the very heart of the speaker! There was no mistaking the sudden thrill of astonished joy. It was indeed as if one had risen from the dead. It was like the frantic, delirious delight of awaking from a dreadful dream to life and happiness—from darkness to light—from a dungeon to a palace, was that outburst of long-suppressed feeling. It was irresistible on both sides, that sudden rapture. The lovers were re-united—the betrothed ones once more met; the longing eyes saw the cherished image; the hungry ears drank in the musical sounds of the beloved voices.

No wonder that all self-control was lost for the moment. No wonder if they sprang into each other's arms, forgetful of the irrevocable gulf that divided them, and that without sin and injustice neither could depend on the other nor indulge the now forbidden love.

But they were fearfully awakened from the happy dream. There was a cry like

that of an enraged tigress; there was a bound as if that same wild animal were asserting and assuaging its thirst for revenge on its prey; and then Edna felt the grasp of strong, fierce arms, saw the glare of glittering, wild-beast eyes, and heard the hissing, cruel tones exclaiming—

"Wretch, how dare you! You would take away my husband! come between me and all I most love on earth! That you shall not. If I die, you shall die too. False hypocrite! You said you were promised to another—that you would marry him, and you shall—or die!" And as Gabrielle poured out these enraged words, she drew a small stiletto from the thick folds of her dress, and aimed it at Edna's heart. For it was she—the supposed victim of the Atlantic waves, who had thus re-appeared in that distant land.

The mystery was in a measure simple, yet no less petrifying. She had been picked up ere life was extinct by that friendly Captain who had brought her with him to Italy, and in due time had returned with him to her native shore—her familiar home. And for what—to what purpose? She had heard and seen the marriage of her lover and her sister. She knew full well that it had been made in the belief that Gabrielle was the heiress of her wealth. A mingled love, and generosity, and fear possessed her as she listened and saw what passed before her then.

They were happy and she was forgotten. She would but spoil their joy and their love, their present and their future, were she to reappear on the scene. This was the substance of the idea floating in her brain, and well-nigh stirring it to madness.

The disclosure of her existence, too, might only risk some dreadful repetition of Gabrielle's fearful deed. Better, far better, to go silently away, to be dead to the world, and in time pray that the semblance might be a reality.

Yet now, without fault of hers, in that distant land, where she was prepared and ready to sacrifice all for Cyril's sake, she was once more exposed to deadly peril. She was standing between the two most near and dear to her. She was in the arms of the lover, in the grasp of the hater, and her life was not worth a moment's purchase, when Cyril, who had for the instant been stunned at the electric shock of the apparition, darted on the frenzied woman whom he had the misfortune to call wife, and attempted to wrest the small but murderous weapon from her hands.

It was a desperate struggle, for Gabrielle had all the strength of a diseased mind in

her delicate frame, and her fury was raised to the utmost pitch by the sight of her husband and the rival sister whom she had believed removed for ever from her path ; but as she was on the very point of gaining the mastery the stern voice of Victor Lemini was heard, and his steps rapidly approaching them, and the terrified patient trembled at the sound.

"Save me ! save me !" she shrieked, clasping Cyril shudderingly in her arms. "You are my husband ! Do not let him have me."

The change of mood was almost miraculous. The enraged woman suddenly was transformed to a shivering, frightened child, hiding itself in the shelter of the one best loved and trusted. Edna, perhaps, felt a sharp pang at the sight. It was so forcible a proof of the relations in which her sister and Cyril stood to each other. Whatever happened, so much at least was unalterable. He was her husband : she had a fixed claim on his protection and his tenderness ; and Edna must yield to the superior rights even of that guilty and deranged creature.

Dr. Lemini quietly drew Edna away. "Go, my love," he said, in a low voice ; "this shall not occur again. I will guard my treasure better."

A look of pain came over Cyril's face as he heard the words. "Edna, is it so ? Are you really married to this man ?" he said, reproachfully, "you—my betrothed !"

Gabrielle raised her head quickly, and gazed on her husband's face with a wan, agonised look. "I see it !—I see it !" she exclaimed. All is of no avail ! You love her, you love her still—and I—I—must die !" And ere he was aware, she had plunged the weapon in her side and fallen fainting on her husband's shoulder. The blood stained her dress, and formed a yet more striking contrast to her white face, and a general thrill of horror seized the little group. All resentment and vexation vanished from their minds at the deplorable sight.

Edna burst from the detaining clasp of the doctor, and flew to her sister's side. "Gabrielle ! Gabrielle ! my poor, poor sister !" she exclaimed. "Oh, wake up ; wake up. Live, and be happy, and I will go away and never see you more."

But Gabrielle was deaf to the words, her senses were gone—the pulsations of her heart were scarcely to be felt, the functions of life were suspended for the time ; and she was conveyed to her room in a state of insensibility that was more akin to death.

\* \* \* \*

The day had passed over in anxious alarm for the very life and consciousness being restored to the invalid. Edna watched tenderly at her bedside, administering all the restoratives that the doctor or her own experience dictated ; but still in vain—and the day closed in, and the night grew dark and heavy, and still Gabrielle lay motionless with the same white face lying on the pillow.

Edna had said no word to Cyril of the past ; and he, whatever his surmises may have been, kept silence also on the subject. This was not the time, when the unfortunate if guilty one lay prostrate, to enter into explanations and recriminations.

"Leave me with her. I will not be afraid," said Edna ; "and perhaps when she is alone and all quiet about her, she may revive. It will be like old times, Cyril, and I will call you—if it is needed. Poor, poor Gabrielle ! what she must have suffered !"

"And you—what *you* must have suffered, Edna !" was the reply. "Only you are an angel, and never dream of yourself in all your wrongs." And as he spoke he turned away, as if to conceal the emotion that he could not control.

At last Edna was alone with the patient, and her true and fervent prayer ascended to Heaven on her behalf. "Father, spare her life !" she said softly, "or at least give her space for repentance and peace ere she dies." The petition was noiseless, but it was from the heart, and the sweet, angelic face of the watcher was indeed soothing and touching for the sufferer to open her eyes upon, when consciousness should return.

The night wore on, ere any sound came from the couch ; and then it was but the feeble wail, "Edna ! Edna ! forgive !"

The sister hastily rose and bent over the bed with tender looks and caressing lips.

"Yes, yes, from my very heart," she replied. "My poor Gabrielle ! no one knows the truth but ourselves, and it shall never pass my lips. Live, and be happy ! I will never interfere with your and Cyril's happiness."

"No, no ; I could not if I would, and I thank God for it. I should only be miserable and jealous, and make him so," she murmured. "I am dying ! Call him, Edna ; let me hear his voice and die in his arms !"

Edna flew to summon both the husband and Dr. Lemini to the patient. She could not believe that death was so near, and she was to a certain extent right, for it was more than one night and day before the sufferer's vital powers yielded to the exhaustion of her strength from the terrible

fever of the brain and the loss of blood that had succeeded to her wound.

"Cyril, you must try to forget that I ever was your wife," she said. "It was but in name; for it was only a ceremony that passed between us when my conscience drove me frantic, even in the moment when I had gained all I had so sinned to obtain. Let it pass away as a dream, when Edna is your happy wife."

"Hush, hush! for pity's sake, Gabrielle!" said Edna, eagerly. "You forget—or rather you do not know, perhaps—that I have promised another. It is wretchedness; but I must keep my promise, even to my own misery."

Gabrielle gave a gesture of despair. "Can it not be undone? Will my guilt follow me to the grave?" she said sadly. But the question was not to be answered for the unhappy sufferer's satisfaction. A fresh outburst of the self-inflicted wound succeeded the agitating thought, and in less than an hour afterwards Gabrielle had breathed her last, almost at the moment when her uncle arrived to support and comfort his son and his sorrowing niece in the melancholy scene, and to assume the task of arranging for the funeral rites to the victim of jealousy and passion.

"Uncle, I have promised. I cannot break my word," reiterated Edna, sadly, when Mr. Elmore indignantly repudiated Victor Lemini's claim on her hand. "It will break my heart; but I cannot draw back."

"Then I shall do it for you," said her uncle, firmly. "It was a base treachery to take such advantage of your helplessness, my brave darling child; and happily it is in vain. You have no power to dispose of yourself without my consent, and that shall never be given to this Italian scoundrel. Thank God! my Edna, you are safe in my keeping and Cyril's once more, and it shall be our sole care to watch over our restored darling's safety and happiness. And listen, my child. In such an exceptional case as this there must be exceptional rules, and it is my desire and advice that you shall become Cyril's wife in three months from this time. The ceremony that bound him to Gabrielle was a merely nominal one, and must not stand in the way of your marriage; and it is my most earnest entreaty that all scruples shall

be waived, and that you both be united." Edna was too thoroughly exhausted in body and mind to oppose what, in truth, was her sole chance of recovering happiness and health, after the terrible strain on her nerves and strength.

It was not till the healing influence of time, and the most incessant and devoted attention on the part of her lover and her uncle had both calmed and strengthened her nerves and cast a softening veil over the agonising past, that she could be induced to give any clear or succinct account of what had occurred during her long absence from those who had so deeply mourned her loss.

"Tell me, darling; what made you suspect that there had been any purpose in the accident which had befallen you?" asked Cyril.

"Dear Cyril, it is a painful subject, but I will tell you all I know, lest you should think I could be guilty of causing you any needless suffering," she replied. "The truth is, in few words, that I, against my will, had more than once suspected poor Gabrielle was suffering from jealous envy of me, though whether of your love for me or my fortune I could not tell; but I crushed back an idea which was so terribly painful, and hoped that all would vanish when we were once married, and the feeling become a sin. Still, there was something in her manner, and the way in which she urged me to go to the dangerous cave that terrible day, which excited my suspicions. And when at last I saw the truth, when that fearful sea kept advancing on me, and I knew that she had gone to leave me to die—then in that awful moment the certainty that she had planned my destruction dawned upon me."

"We never suspected her," said Cyril, musingly, "though often did I think that even your supposed tragic end scarcely warranted her excessive grief and fear. Poor Gabrielle! she has gone, and in her grave let all her sins be buried."

So it was; Gabrielle's name was never mentioned save in love and pity; and in the time originally fixed Edna found a compensation for all her trials as Cyril's wife; and the worthy old Captain who had saved her life was the sole witness to the quiet but most happy union of hands where the hearts had so long been one.

# TEA-TABLE TALK.—BY AMY KEN.

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**T**HE little party assembled early this day. There were some notions entertained by the elders of the family of seaside breezes being valuable; and the younger portions, delighted with the idea of tramping over pastures new, were anxious that Miss Ken would select the most desirable sea-coast where they might spend two weeks, as they did in Wales the previous year. Scotland was suggested, but this was too far away to enable papa to spend his Sundays with his family; and thus, after long deliberation, the Isle of Wight was fixed upon as being easy of access, and affording diversity of scenery, a splendid climate, a fertile soil, and everything which could commend it to those who have a well-filled purse; but, as Miss Ken remarked, "People can live as cheaply, or nearly so, in the most fashionable locality as they can in an isolated residence. The rent may be a little more, but articles of consumption are always obtainable at a comparatively cheap rate, if people marketed for themselves. But the worst of it is," she observed, "that people when they go to Rome think they must do as Rome does. Now, this is by no means necessary; for, as a fact, I know that persons who are prudent, without being stingy, are far more respected than those who assume they are unsuited for house-management and bored when consulted upon expenses. As a rule, these kind of people, when they get in the sere and yellow leaf, change their character altogether, and contend there is nothing like good housekeeping. That is to say, when fashion's frenzy is o'er, a maiden lady—once a beauty, the pride of the ball-room, the admiration of the beaux, and the honoured guest at every reunion—finding her beauty gone, her health affected, and her friends fighting shy of her, begins to wonder why this, that, and the other young gentleman, who lavished such praises in her ears, never *did* propose. She hears now that in their bachelors' parties the gentlemen discussed the 'eligibles' before settling in life; and the proud young ladies, who spent all their time in looking after fashion, they discarded as 'fairy creatures' whom none but fairy kings and princes, able to manufacture gold from stones, could venture to permit to preside over their homes."

"From henceforth," ejaculated Judith, "I will study housekeeping. I will make myself mistress of all the secrets, and be

able to tell how much a three-course dinner for twelve persons ought to cost, and how much per week a happy couple can live upon in a cosy manner without company. If the gentlemen are all looking for economical wives, I think it is our duty to become perfect adepts in the art of economy."

"And then, again, you may fall from Scylla to Charybdis, for no gentleman would care to have a stingy wife, or one who was always telling him how much the dinner cost, &c."

"Well, aunt," said Annie, "I wish you would lay down some rules by which we may carry credentials, and be accounted worthy of prudent gentlemen."

"The great thing to study is to live within your income and commence in your own small way. For instance, your father allows each of you five pounds per quarter pin-money; and if you exceed that, or borrow upon your expectations, you would fall into the same error when you were married; and although you may associate with *supernal* people, there is no occasion for you to imitate them, unless you have as much money as they. Indeed, those who are in a superior position will positively respect you more for your prudence than if you 'dashed' as they did."

"Will you give us the meaning of the word *supernal*?" said Helena, who had just entered the room, "for my husband was applying it the other day to something celestial."

"And he was quite right. Shakespeare uses it thus—

'That *supernal* Judge that stirs good thoughts  
In any breast of strong authority  
To look into the blots and stains of right.'

Milton also uses it in the same way; but its actual Latin meaning is 'having a higher position,' and it is now used locally for anything above or superior to us."

"Tell us something more about the 'Lady of the Lake,'" said Helena, "or something which would do for a recitation."

"I will read you one which will exactly suit your husband; and, given in the martial manner I heard it recited the other night, it will be acceptable to any audience. It is one of the striking passages in the poem. It is where Sir Roderick is represented as calling up his men suddenly from their ambush when FitzJames expressed his impatience to meet that murderous chieftain and his clan:—

"Have, then, thy wish!"—He whistled shrill,  
 And he was answered from the hill:  
 Wild as the scream of the curlew  
 From crag to crag the signal flew.  
 Instant, through copse and heath arose  
 Bonnets, and spears, and bended bows;  
 On right, on left, above, below  
 Sprang up at once the lurking foe;  
 From shingles grey their lances start,  
 The bracken bush sends forth the dart;  
 The rushes and the willow-wand  
 Are bristling into axe and brand,  
 And every tuft of broom gives life  
 To plaided warrior armed for strife.  
 That whistle garrison'd the glen  
 At once with full five hundred men—  
 As if the yawning hill to heaven  
 A subterranean host had given.  
 Watching their leader's beck and will  
 All silent there they stood and still,  
 Like those loose crags whose threatening mass  
 Lay tottering o'er the hollow pass,  
 As if an infant's touch could urge  
 Their headlong passage down the verge:  
 With step and weapon forward flung,  
 Upon the mountain side they hung.  
 The mountaineer cast glance of pride  
 Along Benledi's living side;  
 Then fixed his eye and sable brow  
 Full on Fitzjames—"How say'st thou now?  
 These are Clan Alpine's warriors true,  
 And, Saxon—I am Roderick Dhu."

And much more of the same thing is continued in what I contend is powerful poetry, and depicts a scene stronger than if written in prose. But we have had enough of poetry for once."

"Were not the Scotch a very superstitious people in early periods?" asked Judith.

"Yes; but I think Sir Walter Scott exceeds in parts of his novels the wild fancies of the people, and I am afraid he has done more to perpetuate superstition than any Scotch author who has ever written; but then he tells his stories so well that you cannot help being interested in them. Certainly the Scotch up to the present moment have been better educated than the English. Before Board Schools were thought of, Scotchmen, as a rule, sent all their children to school and instructed them at home, and it became a proverb—"The Scotch scholar, the English braggart, and the Irish brawler."

"When the subject of the ignorance of the early inhabitants of this island was introduced by you, reference only was made to a period antecedent to Christ, or a short time afterwards," said Helena. "Can you just sketch our progress since?"

"Well, Great Britain was in a state of barbarism up to the year 55 B.C., when the Roman emperor, Julius Caesar, invaded this island, and was amazed at the strange religion and barbarism of this country. This great conqueror, who had made his capital the greatest in the world, was

shocked and surprised when he saw the people of this country so ignorant. He records this fact in letters to Rome, wherein he tells his subjects that he desires to enlighten the minds of a people little better than the brute creation. These Druids worshipped in the depths of gloomy forests or within huge circles of rough stones. They thought it an insult to their gods to worship them in temples made by human hands. On the altars human blood was shed. Julius Caesar, in one of his letters, says that sometimes they made monstrous wickerwork baskets in the shape of a man, and having filled it with people the priests had condemned, set it on fire and consumed it, while the congregation stood round singing and rejoicing, as they believed they were offering a pleasant sacrifice to their favourite divinity, the sun, which they worshipped under the name of Bel. All were under the power of the Druidical priests, who exacted what they pleased from the ignorant people. It was dark and terrible in Britain then; no savage race that exists now were worse, excepting only that the Ancient Britons were not cannibals. Julius Caesar, heathen though he was, loved justice, and was the first civiliser Britain had ever seen. He taught the people certain arts and sciences; he showed them how to produce bricks and build comfortable dwellings; and he made them to a certain extent cultivate the land for their own as well as his occupying army's advantage. Throughout the whole of England Roman remains still exist dotted over the country, where cities were made and houses of substantial form must have evidently been built. Good roads were formed from one part of the country to another, even to the confines of Wales, and he taught the inhabitants that a system of industry meant real domestic happiness. Thus we have really much to thank Julius Caesar for, and we have little to pride ourselves upon when we look to a very long pedigree; indeed, it is otherwise with our 'old nobility'—as the term now is—none of them dare take origin before the time of William the Conqueror, and the proudest assume their right of possession as given them under the Norman Conquest. A few claim ancestry from the Danes, and some from the Saxons, but none, I think, from the Ancient Britons, except the Welsh, of whom more anon. We will, however, resume this subject on a subsequent occasion. In the meantime I want you to collect together your seaside articles to be ready for an early trip, as your papa has quite decided to take you to the Isle of Wight."

## FAMOUS MEN AND WOMEN.

### MR. J. L. TOOLE, THE COMEDIAN.

**M**ANY puns have been made upon Mr. Toole's name, but all seem to have lapsed into one expression—he is "the people's Toole," for there is no comedian on the stage at the present time who can compare with him in popularity. The only man who ever enjoyed so much in former years was the late Paul Bedford, whose "I believe you, my boy," was echoed through every street in London for many months.

We are, however, not writing of Paul Bedford, but of John Laurence Toole, who is the son of Mr. Toole, that civic toastmaster whose face and form were better known at every Lord Mayor of London's banquet than that of any of the numerous guests. John Laurence was born on the 12th of March, 1830; he was educated at the City of London School, and afterwards placed with a wine-merchant, and in due time took a clerk's position with a decent salary. If his heart was not at that time too full of *Folly* to ever work at trade, he was determined to bestow as little labour on business as he could, and as much time on private theatricals as possible. A "City Histrionic Club" had been quietly established; and, mostly without the consent of parents, a number of young men had become members, amongst others Mr. J. L. Toole. It happened one evening that they determined to play the "Merchant of Venice" at the Sussex Hall, Leadenhall Street, Toole taking the part of *Antonio* in plain evening dress. Mr. Yates, in his "Celebrities at Home," gives us, in the great comedian's own words, what occurred:—

"We had passed a resolution not to dress for our parts, and we all kept it but *Skylock*, who sold us by coming in late fully dressed for the part from *Simmons's*." A morning or two afterwards the wine-merchant's clerk, fired by success, was studying the "Boots at the Swan" at his desk, when the awful words, "It will be your ruin, John! John, you have been reciting in public!" reached him, and his master, one Blumenthal, stood before him, horror-stricken, and looking warnings unspeakable. In vain did John endeavour to evade the charge. A friend of the wine-merchant's had been at the Sussex Hall, and "guilty! and throw myself on the mercy of the Court" was the culprit's only resource. The degradation and misery certain to follow upon any repetition of the offence, and if all hankering after "play acting" were not summarily suppressed, were painted in sorrow and in anger; "and," as Mr. Toole remarked to his friend, "without the least effect," adding,

with a rare twinkle of the eye and a humorous glance round the room replete with every comfort, "and I have not done quite so badly as my father expected; while Mr. Blumenthal, poor fellow! became a bankrupt soon after this conversation."

Notwithstanding slight impediments in his path, Mr. Toole determined to be an actor; and a benefit being given to Mr. F. Webster, on the 22nd of July, 1852, in which amateur actors were invited to assist, young Toole, then in his twenty-second year, gladly availed himself of the opportunity of treading the Haymarket boards and facing a London audience. He took the part of *Simmons*, in the "Spitalfields Weaver," and passed through this ordeal so well that he determined to adopt the stage as a profession, and was at once engaged by Mr. C. Dillon, the lessee of the Queen's Theatre, Dublin, where his powers were deservedly appreciated.

Following the line of many great actors, he remained in the provinces for two years, having taken engagements at Belfast, Edinburgh, and Glasgow; and it was not till 1854 that he received his first London engagement from Mrs. Seymour, who had then the management of the St. James's Theatre; and here he sustained a variety of characters in low comedy, with such humour and fidelity, that the "gods" already began to worship him, whilst discerning minds saw that the actor's powers could be extended far beyond the characters he was then taking. His first friend, Mr. C. Dillon, having taken the Lyceum for a short time, engaged young Toole to assist him; then he was accepted by Mr. Webster as his leading comedian at the Adelphi, when his name became celebrated, not only in London, but throughout the length and breadth of the land; therefore, when he went to star in the provinces, he met with such ovations as seldom fall to one individual.

Having made several provincial tours, he witnessed many curious actions of men; and the way in which he relates these anecdotes to his friends always creates the loudest laughter. Here, for instance, is a story of his own telling: "It was a pleasant little country town, where I was announced to play for one night, and they had just lighted the lamps. The carriages were setting down at the front door of the Assembly Rooms, and crowds had besieged the side one. I could discover no other entrance, so returned to the front, and tried to pass the portals, when I witnessed a little comedy in which I was at once engaged, for my own edification. 'Can't you

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MR. J. L. TOOLE, THE COMEDIAN.

let me in?' I asked a hot and excited policeman, who had been posted at the principal entrance. 'Yellow tickets this way,' was the policeman's constant cry. 'Have you got a yellow ticket?' he asks. 'No, I've not; but I must go in, I can't come to-morrow night.' 'To-morrow night,' says the policeman, with disdain; 'it wouldn't be no good if you could, he won't be here to-morrow night.' 'Who? I asked.' 'Why, this 'ere Toole.' 'Oh, he won't, won't he? Well, then, I really must go in.' 'It ain't no use shoving, you can't go in without a yellow ticket,' adding, for the benefit of the crowd, in a louder key, 'Yellow tickets this way.' I looked at my watch and returned to the attack. 'I say, look here, I don't mind telling you, but you know this here Toole can't act unless I am there.' 'Oh, go on, now; don't you keep a-bothering me—yellow tickets this way.' 'But I must keep a-bothering you. I am his barber, and I curl his hair.' 'You curls his hair! How am I to know that?' 'Well, if you'll come outside I'll show you the scissors.' 'Come outside! How can I come outside?' 'Well, you can come outside without a yellow ticket. Don't want a yellow ticket to come outside, do you?' said I. 'Now, look here, mister, you must stand on one side. Yellow tickets this way.' 'I don't want a yellow ticket to stand aside, then, do I?' 'No,' said the policeman. 'And you don't want a yellow ticket to come outside, and yet you want a yellow ticket to go inside. Now, how do you reconcile that to your conscience? I can't make it out.' The policeman looked at me with a bewildered air, inclined to get angry, and shouted aloud once more, 'Yellow tickets this way,' just as a peal of laughter came down the room denoting the first piece was nearly finished. I looked anxiously at my watch, and was just rescued from what might have been an awkward dilemma by the appearance of Mr. George Loveday, my manager, who at once preceded me with a yellow ticket."

This is, perhaps, not one of the best anecdotes that could be selected of the many thousands Mr. Toole has in store for his friends. His love of harmless fun is proverbial, but in this there lingers nothing uncharitable or ungenerous; indeed, most of his stories tell of his own discomfiture, and not that of his friends, but space will not permit us to quote them.

The respect in which Mr. Toole is held in England was distinctly shown when he declared his intention of visiting America in 1874. A public banquet was given to him in Willis's Rooms, at which the Earl of Rosebery presided. Perhaps he never said a truer thing than that Mr. Toole's

humour is not only always genial, but always pure; and middle-aged readers who can recall "Adelphi Screamers" of the olden time appreciate the reformation in stage-jokes and allusions which this great actor has done so much to effect. In Birmingham another great banquet was given in his honour, over which Mr. George Dawson presided, both of which were remarkable testimonies of public appreciation of Mr. Toole personally, as well as of his histrionic powers. His style of acting is marked by a close fidelity to nature in every character he undertakes, whether it be in the broad region of farce or in those more important parts in which tears and laughter equally predominate, such as *Caleb Plummer*, in the version of Mr. Dickens's "Cricket on the Hearth," or the honest fireman, *Joe Bright*, in the drama "Through Fire and Water."

His friends were glad to see him back at the Gaiety Theatre, in London, in the latter end of 1875, and they were still more pleased when he took possession of the "Folly," in 1879, and called it Toole's Theatre, where, in 1882, he commenced playing the last and most successful comedy piece of the season, by Henry J. Byron, called "Auntie," which was received nightly by the crowded audiences with roars of laughter. Their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales twice honoured Toole's Theatre with their gracious presence to see this piece, and upon each occasion manifested their approbation at the admirable manner in which it was performed.

Perhaps at this time there is not a pleasanter theatre in London than Toole's, and nowhere is better entertainment provided. The dramatic critic of the *Court Journal*, writing in March, 1882, says:—

"Mr. Toole has transformed the dingy, badly-arranged Folly into the prettiest and most comfortable theatre in the Metropolis. Blue and gold are the dominant colours in the decoration; but a matter of far more importance is the easy exit from all parts of the house. Although Mr. Toole has not exactly fulfilled his promise to give every spectator a separate door, he has, however, imparted unusual facilities for an easy and rapid clearing of the building in case of alarm."

On the whole, Mr. Toole and the public are to be congratulated on the changes that have been made, and it is to be hoped that he will long enjoy the fruits of his manifold labours, and that they will meet with the same measure of success that has hitherto attended his efforts, which have been so ably seconded by his popular



# FOUR ROSES.

BY "NOMAD,"

AUTHOR OF "OWLSCROFT," "ONE SUMMER DAY," ETC.

## CHAPTER I.



YOU will get a splendid view of them if you will just leave the crowd at the door of that stately mansion at Hyde Park Corner and slip quietly down this side-path, and in through this mews, to an outlet that leads straight to St. Dunstan's Church, where the ceremony is to be performed that shall make Lady Alice Kervin the wife of the rich *parvenu*, Richard Waugh. He is not very young, he is not very handsome, but he has

"Gold, gold, old gold,  
Bright and yellow, hard and cold,"  
and what unloveliness will not  
gold gild?

There, I told you so, we shall just meet the carriage as it nears the church-door, and out of it will step into the reeking mass of the "great unwashed" our Four Roses.

First, with a half-startled glance into the crowd of eager faces on the pavement, steps Lady Rose Kervin, first bridesmaid, sister to the bride. Then, with a haste that almost trips her forward, into a handsome young groomsman's arms, alights the Honourable Rose Hunter, cousin to the bride. Then, with a pretty shy glance at the crowd, including the two stalwart, admiring policemen who are trying to keep them back in their places, comes Rose Delmar, another cousin of the bride; and last, though not least, for she is decidedly the tallest, the stateliest, the most commanding, of our quartette, slowly steps Rose Helstone. With a proud, half-amused, comprehensive glance at the thronged pavement, she sweeps with haughty pose into the crowded church.

This carriage is followed closely by the bride's, and out of it comes an anxious, careworn-looking, elderly man. He, too, glances, but with an impatient look, at the eager faces of the interested, excited crowd.

"Come," he says, as he holds out his hand to help his child from the far corner into which she seems to shrink in a gleaming haze of lace, satin, and beautiful flowers, which are no whiter than her soft young cheeks, and whose petals, held by her shaking hands, tremble no more than do her sweet young lips.

With a hurried start, in answer to her father's behest, she gives him her hand, and comes down into the crowd with shamed, downcast eyes, and passes through them like a shining mist.

"Ah me!" says a poor, dirty woman, "me gown were not so grand, but me face was a-merrier the day I married my man"—and she tosses up her fine healthy baby, who

albeit dirty as dirty can be, crows lustily, enjoying the glitter and the shaking of the harness on the prancing horses. A laugh passes through the throng, elicited by the quick sympathy of their class. The glittering pageant is over for them; stillness reigns in the dim church; the interior bustle seems to revolve itself into a listening quietude; then with a ponderous crash, the ringers strike the sounding metal—

" Hark to the wedding bells !  
How the mocking music swells,  
As before the shrine of gold  
Hearts and lives are bought and sold."

With that shrinking bride we have nothing to do, lovely though she may be. We know that in an agony of pain she only last night made a holocaust of every vestige of love-token, every scrap of letter, that held her troth to the brave sailor far across the seas, unwitting of the misery of her he loved so well and trusted so blindly.

" Poor girl ! Was she false ? Tell us about it," do I hear you say ?

Hush ! the love-tokens are ruined past recognisance ; the letters are ashes. The bells are ringing with maddening peals. She is no longer a girl with a story to be unfolded to you ; she is a wife. We stand aside and leave her future in the hands of her husband, Richard Waugh. We shall see the sailor-lover again : he will figure in our pages ; but now our interest lies immediately with our " Bonny bunch of roses, O ! "—the Four Roses, with stories all untold, with futures all undecided, with fluttering hopes and fears rising and falling in each young heart.

Since we have been speaking of gold, or, to be more prosaic, money, perhaps you may think, having glanced at these girls alighting from that bridal carriage, and noted their separate individualities, that the last you saw, handsome Rose Helstone, with her proud, commanding style, was the richer of our roses. Not so ; she is the poorer of them all ; while little shy, winning Rose Delmar is rich, till she feels her riches a burden to her, and must perforse have a companion in Rose Helstone, on whom she may lean, to enable her to bear the weight of them. Always thus from childhood, during all their school-days, had gentle little Rose Delmar leaned on the stronger nature of Rose Helstone. There was no question of any difference of position owing to this—none whatever ; they were truest, strongest friends in every sense of the word. They were so constantly together that they were frequently dubbed "Roses in leash," or the "Inseparables."

The Hon. Rose Hunter, too, is rich—rich against her will, and but very lately. Only a few short weeks before our story opens a querulous old uncle had left her possessed of his hoarded gains, coupled with an embargo to marry a certain man whom she had never seen since she was a baby of five, and could remember a great hulking boy who used to give her "pig-on-back" rides, and teach her leap-frog. At least, she would feel bound to marry this man should he seek her out and ask her, since this most dogmatic, unfeeling will stipulated that in the event of Noland Steers refusing to do this, all the moneys were to be hers entirely, with the exception of a paltry £300 a-year he might still claim. Very paltry this, after expecting all his life to come in for double as many thousands.

Rose Hunter is a high-spirited, light-hearted girl, perfectly free from all manner of affection, and thoroughly heart-whole at the time when she discarded her mourning for the day, to keep her old promise of making the fourth "Rose bridesmaid" at her cousin's wedding. She is all this, but not untroubled by any means. She feels her position to be such an anomalous one, so utterly false, so abominably helpless. She would willingly have signed away every penny of the riches heaped on her with such a degrading embargo attached, but this she had found only yesterday she may not do ; and as yet, she can hear nothing of what steps Noland Steers is likely to take in the matter. "Perhaps the man is engaged already," she thinks. "No doubt, if he has any spirit at all he will hate the thought of a girl so thrust on him ; and yet he had all his life been led to expect this money, and it was hard, desperately hard, he should be so entirely done out of it. And even if he is not engaged, and has no wish to be to any special woman, what man could be expected to fall in love with any girl led up to him in such fashion ; and what girl could be expected to fall in love with any such man ?" Not she, Rose Hunter, anyhow—of that she feels morally certain ; and tears of vexation stand in her merry blue eyes, as she dons her bridesmaid's dress of soft pink satin, with its wealth of maiden-blush roses scattered so miraculously over its train.

Then, as she turns round to allow the maid to adjust the chaplet of the same flowers on her bright crisp auburn hair (red hair, her envious dear friends call it), she sees the sombre black dress lying that she has but now taken off, and ejaculates aloud, "That horrid old man !"

"Never mind, dearie ! hold still, please," and as she settles the fair, fair roses among

the rippling hair, the shrewd elderly woman, who had been first her nurse and is now her maid, says sententiously, "Only be patient, dear Miss Rose, and it will all come right in the end. No man alive, unless he were in love with some other, could see you and not love you, I'm pretty sure."

"Pshaw, Nelson! he'll stand a fair chance of hating me, poor fellow! I pity him from my very heart; and I shall be ashamed to look him in the face. Fancy a girl not being a free agent in the disposal of her heart and hand! Why, for very shame I couldn't say no, when by saying it I should take a whole £6,000 a-year away from him, which of course he has always considered as his alone. Oh, it is abominable! it is disgraceful! If he does not ask me I shall be wretched, because I shall feel a robber of his money; and if he does ask me I shall despise him, I know I shall. The horrid, heartless old fellow! to dare to do such a trick on his death-bed!"

"Hush, hush, my dear! Come, the carriage is ready."

One more Rose, the bride's sister, Lady Rose Kervin, well deserves the epithet "bonny." She is one of those sweet, innocent, loving, and lovable girls, with nothing about her particularly beautiful, or particularly striking, or specially presumptuous in any way, yet making such a quietly charming whole that she is a universal favourite everywhere. From the oldest woman to the youngest girl—from the oldest man to the youngest lad—all agree with more or less fervour that Rose Kervin was the flower of the flock in the impoverished house of that name. On this morning of her sister's wedding her sweet face is troubled and anxious: all the rush and the glitter vex and perplex her. "If she could but save her sister!" she thinks, with a shudder.

After the bustle of the wedding, things settle down for a short time to the ordinary daily groove. Each inhabitant of the mansion goes his or her own way individually, and no one cares to intrude more than may be on the quiet of its master, the Earl of Kervin. We say its master; but the mansion, in point of fact, had Richard Waugh for its owner, even before the day of his wedding the daughter of the house; and it is to be in future the town residence that will hold the treasure his gold has bought.

Rose Delmar and Rose Helstone take their departure a week afterwards to Castle Delmar, in a picturesque part of Devon, where the two girls declare they can

always feel freer and happier than elsewhere, where they live their bright girlish lives in exactly such mode as day after day shall define for them, with no hard-and-fast Society rules to fetter and compel them. The Hon. Rose Hunter next departs on a round of visits, to end at a given time at Castle Delmar, where Lady Rose Kervin is to meet her, and where the bride has promised to spend her first week on her return from the long foreign tour upon which she has departed.

Lady Rose Kervin feels it very hard to bid adieu for this long indefinite time to her three dearest friends, and finds the huge house lonely beyond bearing without the gentle companionship of her elder sister—only their old friend and governess now to console her; and one can scarcely fancy the tender, clinging girl finding much solace in the constant companionship of the elderly Miss Sophia Demmont, for that lady is a rather terrible maiden of most uncertain age and temper, and her general appearance is not calculated to inspire the beholder with any warmer sentiment than an inward thanksgiving that it is not their lot to be with her always.

"And now, my dear," she is saying, "we will return to our interrupted course of quiet reading. There is quite an accumulation to get through. I wish you to read carefully Ruskin's 'Fiction, Fair and Foul,' and I hope he will convince you of the disadvisability of reading promiscuously so many novels. I think he cannot fail to do so."

"I dare say Mr. Ruskin would be the very last to imagine it himself," answers Lady Rose, a little impatiently.

Miss Sophia at the girl's tone glances sharply at her, and asks stonily, "For why, may I inquire, Rose?"

"Oh, because he is so full of his own overweening importance."

"My dear Rose!" says Miss Sophia, greatly shocked; and the young girl adds, a little wearily—

"You know I do not share your admiration of the man, although he may be quite as transcendantly clever in his way as it is possible for a man of letters to be; but he is so desperately pragmatic, and lays down the laws of thought for others too dogmatically. I will read his paper with you, though; but I am afraid I shall only retire to my dear novels with renewed zest, out of mere contrariness."

"I am afraid, my dear, that Rose Hunter has been imbuing you with some of her peculiar notions. These speeches are unlike you."

Rose Kervin, who knows there have

been some sundry passages of arms between these two, hastens to dismiss the idea of any such interference, more especially as this indeed had been the case ; and her blushes rise uncomfortably at finding that Miss Sophia has hit the mark so very nearly. She opens the *Nineteenth Century*, and flips the leaves a little nervously till she comes to the place indicated ; then once more a saucy smile deepens round her tiny mouth, and she asks—

" Where is our little consulting dictionary, dear Miss Sophia ? for I can see at a glance there are numberless puzzling words instead of the simple ones that might have done the same duty and saved us so much trouble." But Miss Sophia Demmont sits severe in her learned, hard mentorship, and the girl sees she has, perhaps, trodden on her toes a little too severely ; and it is not in her nature to hurt the feelings of any of her fellow-creatures.

" Forgive me, dear Miss Sophia," she says prettily. " I am not quite myself—all this wedding excitement has demoralised me. I am very wrong to dare say such things, but I cannot help finding more pleasure, and knowledge of the world too, from the pleasant writings of men and women who live, and love, and suffer in it, and so write of it as it is. I feel, you know, so angry with this cold, hard-judging man, who stamps on just the people whose books I most intensely enjoy, and who rouse every bit of feeling and sympathy in me."

" And then you let yourself be childishly led into weak partisanship and inane reasonings, dear Rose, and presume to speak in idle spleen of a man whose mind is as an unsealed fount of deepest knowledge to you"—and Miss Sophia rears her head, crowned with its thin dark hair, all scraped into a wiry-looking ring on the top in a style which she flatters herself is classical. Rose, feeling now in a properly humble spirit, commences to read as desired.

\* \* \* \*

There is a saying that " one half the people in the world are sent into it to bother the other half." How true this may be I know not, although I do opine that the idea must have originated in some mind who shaped it into words from some very cogent reasoning ; for if one thinks of it there appears much to substantiate the opinion. Presuming on this basis, no doubt Frank Helstone's mission in the world was to bother Noland Steers, since on his joining him after the wedding at a house in Wales, where the latter is staying, he is accosted with—

" Well, Frank, here you are at my heels again ! I fancied I had got rid of you for an indefinite time. What fresh scrape are you in now ? "

" None at all, Steers, as it happens," answers the well-looking young fellow so addressed, a weaker likeness of his handsome sister. " The wedding passed off splendidly. Waugh's not so very bad considering. You ought to have gone, by Jove ! "

" You forget that Charlie Dene is my nearest friend"—this haughtily.

" Oh, well, I can't help her throwing him over, you know ; he'll get over it—we all do."

" You speak from experience, I suppose ?" still unsoftened.

" Dash it, Steers, don't be so down upon me, or I shall think that you are more hipped about that confounded will than you own ; and talking of that, I ran down here almost on purpose to tell you that she—Rose Hunter—was there. By Jove ! though, she's a clipper, and no mistake. I should go in for her neck and crop—you're an ass if you don't, she's a splendid girl—eyes that would just take any fellow's heart at a glance, who was not——"

" Bewitched by Rose Delmar's," laughed the other, coolly lighting a cigar.

" Ah, if you like, chaff away ; but I came like a true friend to tell you all, and I mean to do it ; and then I shall relieve you of my presence, for I'm due at the Castle——"

" As the favoured darling of its small mistress ?" queries Noland ; but Frank Helstone passes over the question and goes on—

" Her hair is like the brightest Canadian gold. It is lovely ; it glints, and ripples, and——"

" Meander's," suggests the other, whereat they both laugh heartily, and Noland Steers says, with a comical grimace—

" It has improved, then, or been judiciously doctored ; for as a child I remember I always called her Rufus ; it was unmistakably red ! "

" And her skin is dazzling."

" Sure it isn't freckled ? Freckles always go with red hair."

" Shut up, Nol ; you just see her, and you'll be sorry enough, you said all this ; you'll 'cave in' at first sight, and your £6,000 a year is as sure as that I——as that——"

" Well ?" and the cigar is critically examined before a neat pile of ash is carefully disintegrated from its apex. Frank Helstone blushes—actually blushes.

" Go on, Frank," says Noland Steers, with a friendly smile this time, " I've a heart

that can feel for another. Rose Delma is the kind of girl who will never make a fellow *feel* her riches. I congratulate you with all my heart."

"Don't be a fool, Nol; I won't tell you any more of Miss Hunter, and I know you're dying to hear all about her."

"My dear boy, don't vilify yourself; you are good-natured enough to go on for ever, like the brook. Fire away; you haven't told me about her teeth yet, or her hands, or her feet, or her figure, or, in fact, any of the essential points."

"I'll be shot if I ever do a good-natured turn for you again. I rushed off down here post-haste on purpose to tell you what a jolly little brick this girl is, and to persuade you to put aside all your feelings of pride and go in for her. I don't believe she is any more comfortable about it than you are, because I know she was awfully cut-up when old Screwtight, the head of the firm, told her firmly it was no use for her to try to set the will aside, and she's not the girl that would make any man as a husband feel her money—as you call it; and besides, hang it, in this case it would not by rights be hers—it would be your own; and so she'd feel, or I'm a Dutchman. She's just the jolliest little creature——"

"Bar one," interpolates Noland, smiling aggravatingly. At which Frank lies back in his chair, simply saying, with uncontrollable conviction—

"Noland Steers, you are a fool! Here you will be *that mulish* in your obstinacy, as old Nurse Patterson used to say to me, that you'll let this girl slip through your fingers, and lose all the money, for a Quixotic pride which is utterly unworthy of you."

"Phew! my dear boy; why, you are actually waxing eloquent—in fact, you will soon eclipse the celebrated penny book."

"And after all my trouble——"

"Now," laughs Noland, "be generous; don't drag that in again. You know full well that coming down here was less trouble to you than writing me a decent letter. By-the-bye, did you get mine?"

"Yes, I got it; and do you mean to say you are still in the same mind and intend to bury yourself in that hole, and cast away your every chance?"

"I think, Frank, I told you in the letter that I would never marry Rose Hunter; even if I loved her to distraction I could not now go up and say, 'Will you marry me, Miss Hunter?' It would be equivalent to saying, 'If you don't marry me you are a robber of my money.' The girl would not be a free agent. Can you not see it, man? Why, the poor girl would despise

me; or, if she did not, I should despise her for the omission."

"Bosh! You look at it in altogether a false light," answered Frank, who felt his reasonings sliding away from him, and the moral ground being cut from under his feet; so he relapsed perforce into his single cry—"Only see her, consent to know her, you would love her at first sight."

"The saints forbid!"

"And you—why, she'd be madly in love with you in a day; you know they all are."

"Poor creatures! how distressing for them! Hydrophobia must be a joke to it. Ah, my friend, it will be *un autre chose* now, you'll see. '*Le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle;*' they will all know there is nothing but my bare inches of manhood to be gained. Henceforth I shall figure as a detrimental. It will be a new sensation, and that in itself is something gained in these days. And now let us change the conversation. As I told you in my letter, I shall never marry any woman unless I love her for herself alone; then nothing on earth should keep her from me; and I shall never marry Rose Hunter—never willingly know her till she is some other man's wife; and then I will freely meet her and shake hands over it. I owe her no ill-will whatever; in point of fact, her position must be to the full as unbearable as mine, or more so."

"And you persist in not coming to Castle-Delmar for the 1st?"

"If she is to be there, and her future is still unsettled, yes! Did you ever know me alter a decision once formed?"

"You stubborn animal!"

"Hush, my dear boy, don't give way to such naughty epithets. How is your sister?"

"Oh, she is all right."

"As handsome as ever?"

"Yes, after her style. I confess I can't see what there is in her for fellows to rave about as they do; she'd chill me to the marrow."

"Simply because your eyes are blinded by the fact of your brotherhood. It is, no doubt, natural for a man to admire other fellow's sisters more than his own; but not having one myself I can't speak from personal knowledge. I wonder," he goes on thoughtfully, "if she will ever marry? Sometimes that type of girl is the last to go off. Men run after all the little mindless inanities of the species Woman, and pass over one like her; or perhaps it is *vice versa*—we get passed over by them."

"More like it. She's refused scores of men; but she'll never marry while Miss Delmar is single," answers her brother, with conviction.

"And then?" smiles the other.

"Oh, and then I expect she'll give in. She has always had a sneaking fancy for a certain Q.C. we both know."

"Darlingford?" asks Steers.

Frank nods his head, and feels a half-guilty sensation in admitting so much; and he hastens to add, "Mind, I know nothing about it, it is only my idea; and I know she has a Quixotic notion of devoting herself to Miss—to Rose Delmar."

"That's better, Frank; out with the name bravely."

"You idiot!"

"Hush! idiot is as bad as animal, and more insulting to my intellect. So you have plucked your Rose: may she be without a thorn!"

"Stop it, do; one never knows whether you are chaffing or in earnest. If you were not an absolute ass you'd pluck—"

"A Rose for myself. No, I prefer a modest violet, a pure lily, or—"

"You're incorrigible; and I'm not going to stay smoking here all night. You forget—I've had a long journey. I'm off to bed!"

"I'm with you there, although I was too polite in my character as host to suggest such a course; but I'm fain to confess your conversation has made me as sleepy as an owl."

## CHAPTER II.

**R**OSE HELSTONE is not blind to the fact that her friend Rose Delmar has something on her mind that she is longing to communicate. Several times in the course of the week after the wedding she has half led up to it, blushed, been overcome with nervousness, and always through some interruption has left the tale unfolded. That week has been so full of varied interest, and the four girls have been so constantly together, that no sufficiently uninterrupted time has occurred for gentle, shy Rose Delmar to tell her great secret to her "inseparable." Rose Helstone, however, guesses pretty nearly what it might be. For a long time she has known of her brother's love for this girl; and she has known too—not being quite blind—that Rose Delmar's love is as fully his; but an idea that he is in love with Lady Rose Kervin has somehow taken possession of the little heiress's mind, and Rose Helstone is not the friend, situated as she is, to make or mar any such matter, insomuch as she feels her position a strangely delicate one. Rose Delmar is so rich that she must needs benefit whoever she marries, and although her brother

is no mean *parti*, still *she* cannot say one word either way; so she has been neutral and silent, yet now can see things were shaping their course in the direction she most desires.

"What is to be, will be," she thinks, and is thankful she has not spoken or interfered in the matter. She feels that she may congratulate herself on her wisdom. Rose Delmar, through this reticence so naturally affected, has thought her strangely blind, and her brother has considered her cold and unsympathising, when it has only been, to her eyes, a clear duty to see, and be blind; to hear, and be deaf; to know, yet not understand.

She fancies now, seeing Rose happier and evidently desirous of telling her something of all this, she has some reason to feel assured that Frank's love is not given to Rose Kervin. She does not expect to hear more than this from shy Rose Delmar, and is a little startled as she sits deep in the pages of her *Cornhill* in the railway carriage, on their way to Castle Delmar, as the words strike her ear—

"Rose, do put down that stupid book, when I've so much to tell you."

She smiles, answering, "It is not stupid, it is a particularly interesting number."

"How tiresome you are! You know I want to tell you, and this is the first time we have had a moment's quiet."

"Tell me what, dear?"—this demurely.

But Rose Delmar does not look at her: she keeps her grey eyes fixed persistently on the summer landscape through which they are flying at express speed.

"I am all attention, dear."

"How detestable of you not to help me out. He does not love Rose Kervin."

"I never thought he did, dear."

"Oh, Rose, you know I thought so, and it has been such a trouble to me."

"Yes, dear; you are such a little goose, you know."

"You are not to call me names; very soon I shall be your sister—in September."

"Rose!"—and for once Rose Helstone is fairly surprised at the giant-stride the affair has taken, at the unassisted-by-her decision her shy friend has come to.

"It is quite true, Rose; and you don't seem a bit glad." Then she throws her arms round her friend's neck, and says, "Oh, kiss me and tell me you *are* glad, darling. I am so happy. Dear, darling Frank! I have loved him so long, without daring to hope."

"The rascal!" ejaculates his sister; "and he never told me a word before he went off to Wales."

"I begged him not. I wanted to tell you first myself. I thought you would be so surprised."

"My dear child! why, I've known he has been in love with you since he was fifteen."

"You naughty girl! and you never told me!"

"You never asked me, dear; and, besides, it was his place to tell you that, not mine."

"And you are glad?"—anxiously.

"More glad than I could possibly tell you, my darling"—and little Rose feels no lack of sympathy now, as she sees bright tears shining in Rose Helstone's dark eyes.

"And mind, you will live always with us at Castle Delmar; you will never leave me?"

This time it is Rose Helstone's turn to blush, which she does furiously. "You little goose!" is all she says, "as if Frank would not be able to take care of such a mite of a wife himself, without my help."

"I cannot spare you, even for Frank. Promise me—dear, dear Rose!" But the required promise is not given; the elder girl evades it by dexterously turning the conversation back to the theme of Frank not having told her of all this.

Rose Delmar laughs at her perplexity, and the theme, "Frank," fills every crevice of her mind all the rest of her journey. She makes no mystery of her perfect joy: she declares it is all too absolutely good to be readily believed—that she is too much blessed.

"Isn't he a darling?" she asks.

"Oh, perfect," says Rose, laughing.

"Ah, well, I know you like horrid, stern, clever, sarcastic men, like Noland Steers. I think Frank ever so much nicer."

Rose Helstone gazes out now at the flying landscape with a far-away look in her deep brown eyes, and scarcely hears her companion's remarks. A tender smile gathers round the proud, curved lips, which entirely softens her beauty. Seeing her thus no one could call her hard or cold. She is thinking her own thoughts—thinking them deeply and searchingly, as such women do; and the "specially interesting" number of *Cornhill* lies unheeded on her lap. What can her thoughts be, to cause that softening, intent look to settle down over the handsome face, and to change her beauty into such tender-loveliness? If you like to peep over her shoulder with me this same night, in the privacy of her own room, as she rapidly writes a short note, you may read what will no doubt satisfy you most completely:

"DEAREST RALPH,—Will you doubt my love any more? The time has come when I may leave my darling. She told me only to-day (see how early I have kept my solemn promise to you) that she is to marry my brother Frank almost directly. Whenever you will, I am yours,

"ROSE."

The letter is directed to "Ralph Darlingsford, Esq."

Noland Steers looks with considerable interest at the queer little fishing village—"hole," as Frank Helstone had called it—in which he has decided to bury himself for some of the summer weeks. It behoves him now to turn his serious attention to some hard reading which will enable him to go in for the Bar, the profession he has always, in a dim kind of way, intended to follow, should such need ever occur. This need has seemed far enough off hitherto, but now it is suddenly necessary to put his shoulder to the wheel with a vengeance, unless he were inclined to simply vegetate on £300 a-year, or to continue in the fashionable world as one of those nomadic, unsubstantial creatures—a man living by his wits. He will live by his wits, but he will train his wits, intending to live honestly by them.

Well, there are worse fates, he already feels, than his, as he looks round on his new surroundings, and returns the greetings of the honest fisher-folk, who till to-day have been unaware of his very existence, et now extend simply to him the honest welcome of men. He was never selfishly namoured of his fashionable, idle life, although he has had enough of flattery to enervate most men. There is that in him which keenly responds to this call for exertion, which indeed rejoices at the sharp need for earnest, manly toil. It seems to make a man of him—a creature more worthy his own self-respect. Yes, he has done wisely; he will certainly take up his quarters in this out-of-the-way quiet spot, and read hard, and master some of the toughest details of Coke and Blackstone before finally entering the arena to compete with his fellows in the line he has chosen. He will set earnestly to his self-imposed task; he will cut himself entirely off, for the time being, from all his previous connections; he will thus be a free agent. He will study hard, and live the plain, homely life that the men around him live.

"Pshaw!" he thinks already, with just a tinge of bitterness, "what, after all, does it matter that an old man's will has turned out so differently than was to have been expected?" He wonders now that at first he could have been so affected by it: he is young, his heart is brave and generous;

he will carve out his own fortune. Surely a man, given all this, can make his life what he will.

Noland Steers, in his hitherto lotus-eating existence, has never so faced his own embodiment before. He finds, now that he puts it to the test, that he has a head with a clear enough brain in it—a brain that may yield him in the future that he has marked out for himself—success ; and while working for that end, and waiting its fruition, he has a competence which holds him above want or possibility of debt, yet not sufficient to tempt him from his purpose by any delusive hopes of leading again his old life. He grasps the position boldly, as it is best for all to do to whom such positions present themselves. He lays his hand with a firm grasp on the plough, and does not intend to look back, but forward. As for pleasure, the simple, retired spot in which he finds himself will yield everything he can desire for relaxation in the short intervals of reading that he promises himself. There is the rich hilly country, there is the wild, lovely, glancing sea ; along it there are the high, green cliffs of which he feels he shall never tire. Only Frank Helstone knows his present whereabouts, or his intended course of action, and he will, he knows, respect his desire for silence as to them.

He has thus quietly shut himself off from all outward distractions ; his old places will know him no more for some indefinite period ; and soon his presence ceases to be missed ; his disappointment is a nine days' wonder that does not outlive its allotted space. Soon even people that had courted and caressed him forget to pity him and deplore the act of that "disgusting old heathen" who has turned so eligible a *parti* into such a useless detrimental ; other stars spring up into the place that had been his, and eyes that had brightened at his coming turn their brightening now on the newer stars. Noland Steers is as one who *has been*, and now is not. Verily, there is no sand so shifting as a fickle society.

As the weeks go by Noland does not fail in his purpose, or regret the act which has cut him off from the world. No—the free life, with a settled purpose always before him, has a strange charm for him ; he is content, more than content—he is *happy*.

Lintrock is a picturesque, lovely spot on the Pembrokeshire coast, with a tiny bay, whose waters seem to be always bluer and more translucent to his eyes than had ever been the Bays of Naples and Salerno, or the Lakes of Como and Lucerne. He is busy, he is satisfied—and he is beginning

to realise that for the first time in his life he is "in love." He has felt this rather rough upon him just when he has settled down to real uphill work, to be fettered by a growing love for a lovely, helpless girl, who is the possessor of nothing but her beauty and her talents, by which she ekes out the scanty income possessed by a widowed mother ; but there is no use in denying the fact that each day he dwells more on the image of this young girl, more and more out of the dry-as-dust pages over which he pores will rise the saucy, defiant blue eyes of Helen Greaves ; more and more he finds himself thinking of her and her many sweet graces instead of mastering some horrible twist in the knotty volumes before him. Yes, it is hard on him, yet still it gives him but fresh impetus to work, for her sake now as well as for his own.

He rises, stretches his arms wearily, and, casting aside the knotty books, goes out for a stretch on the high cliffs, where he knows full well he shall find Helen sketching that old wreck which is to be the next picture she must get ready for sale. As he walks along, with a free, swinging step, he marvels that he should have come to this out-of-the-way spot to meet the one woman the world will ever hold for him—that here he must dree his weird, for good or for evil ; that here he must lay himself humbly at the feet of a simple girl, praying her for the gift of her love—that before the light in her girlish eyes his own must fall in full knowledge that she holds his will captive.

Is he sure of her? No ; by turns she plagues and irritates him, by turns she charms and bewilders him ; yet time and again on the verge of claiming her seriousness, the words have died upon his lips, a humbleness, a fear has possessed him—born of his love surely, since it was like nothing he has hitherto experienced—like nothing any of the brilliant belles who have striven for his notice in the gay world have ever seen in Noland Steers.

If we follow him along the cliffs we shall see for ourselves his "love," this Helen Greaves who has taken his very senses captive—who knows but too well that he is hers when she will. We shall be able to calculate his chances to a nicety by joining their *tête-à-tête* on the top of the swelling cliff from which she deftly sketches, with practised eye and sure hand, the fantastic wreck that the angry sea has cast on the lonely beach in the storms of the past winter.

"Excuse me shaking hands ; I am just getting that twisted spar," she says simply, as he nears her. And he sits humbly down beside her, and for some few moments,

neither speak further, only her busy pencil curves, and slides, and moves here and there over the paper at her earnest will, till the wreck begins to assume proper proportions.

She glances at him presently—a sidelong glance, which he does not see; he is quietly smoking his cigar and gazing out to sea. "Well, sir," she says, "and have you been reading very hard all this hot summer day?" As she speaks she holds out for critical inspection her sketch, asking, "Will it do, Mr. Steers?"

"You are much the best judge, Miss Greaves. You know that technically I know nothing of drawing. When a painting is completed, with the colour laid on, I can tell whether I like it or not, and that only in the sense of whether the subject pleases me."

"The colour laid on!" she laughs; "and pray, does this subject please you—this old wreck?"

"No, not at all. I should think it too dismal to sell well."

"Oh, I think there is something so pathetic in an old vessel—a thing once instinct with life—being cast helpless like this—dead—on a lonely, cruel beach. It should make a lovely picture if only I can put my *ideas* into it."

"Yes, looking at it from an artistic point of view, I daresay it will." His tone is listless, his attitude careless, and she answers, a little piqued—

"Oh, well, if it *sells*, that will be sufficient for me."

"Exactly," he answers laconically.

What can be the matter with him, she wonders. She has never seen him in this careless, half-sarcastic mood before. Looking at him, a full, earnest glance this time, she sees with a true woman's instinct that something is troubling him. To Helen Greaves to see this is to speak the thought.

"You are troubled about something—you are unlike yourself this morning; you have never been so unkind, so almost rude to me before," she says.

"Miss Greaves' unkind, rude, and to *you*!" He rises with acuteness, and looks into her sweet face with astonishment pure and simple. He has been used to coolly showing all his varied moods to women of the world, and as beautiful as she, and they had never brought him, the "eligible *parti*," to book—they had but soothed or flattered him the more. How is this? He is half angry that this girl should thus dare; but as he thinks it the ungenerous thought dies. Why should not she? What is he better than herself? Why, indeed,

Nevertheless, it is a new sensation, and for a moment it has nonplussed him. But he can see she is really troubled for him; her merry blue eyes are dim with tears of sympathy, and she says again—

"Is it much that troubles you?"

"I thought I had outlived all these pettulances, dwelling in this peaceful spot; but I see I had reckoned without my host, when even you, a stranger to me till a month ago, can confront me with my failure. I am in trouble, not for myself, but for another, and a much better man, whom a heartless woman has jilted; and this morning I hear the poor fellow is nearing home in complete ignorance, thinking her true, deeming her his."

"And she?" asks Helen, leaning forward, deeply interested.

"Is married to another man for his gold; and Charlie Dene is one of the truest fellows that ever drew breath; and yet, as many another does, he has wasted his love on a thoroughly heartless woman. It is his coming home in such blessed ignorance that floors me," he adds.

"Has no one written to him? Perhaps she was not heartless—perhaps some cruel circumstance was too hard for her; but pardon me," she says hastily, as she sees a hot flush dye his handsome, stern face, "of course I know nothing of all this. I only speak from—from a feeling of sympathy for you."

Again his face softens, and he takes her hand, asking suddenly: "Tell me, Miss Greaves, what shall I do? Charlie Dene has been more than a brother to me from boyhood. He has loved this girl from his earliest manhood, and he started for four years' foreign service, sure of her truth, reliant on her honour; and now he is nearing home. I heard it only this morning from a telegram sent me from Malta. See," he says, pulling it from his pocket. "'Homeward bound. Wish me joy, old friend.' That means, of course, that he has started. Hearing no news from her, he is in complete ignorance. What can I do?"

"Go and meet the ship and break it to him. Don't let him hear it from strangers. Oh, how can women act so? How could she? Poor, poor girl!"

"Poor, poor *fellow*! I think."

"Yes; but we, or at least I, do not know the circumstances. They may have been too hard for her."

Noland Steers looks very stern and very thoughtful for some moments. Then he says, "Your advice is good, Miss Greaves.

By rushing off at once I calculate I could meet the ship at Portland. Helen, shall I find you here on my return?"

"I? Oh, yes; I shall be here for some weeks longer, until I have finished the three other pictures I told you of."

"And then?"

"Then we go abroad again, as I told you."

"Why abroad again?"

"Because we can live cheaper there in the winter, and I can pursue my studies. I can use the galleries free of expense."

"I shall take you being here on my return as a certainty," he says, as he looks at his watch. "You promise it?"

"I never make promises," she says, with sudden irritating demureness. Thus this girl always piques him, as if involuntarily, and again the feeling surges over him that he is not sure of her. He looks into her downcast face, and asks—

"Will you kindly look at me, Miss Greaves?"

"Oh, certainly, Mr. Steers," and the blue eyes look full into his stern grey ones, and instead of any distressful sorrow in them, there is a daring, saucy defiance in their clear depths, and a great unrest seizes him. He wonders as he gazes at her, and takes in all her many beauties, if she is only mocking him, or whether—

"You will not reach your destination, surely, if you do not go at once—"

"Is that all you have to say?"

"What would you have me say?" and there is no melting tenderness in the fearless, sunny eyes; only gay—was it mocking?—indifference.

He turns passionately from her, and is gone. And she? All the gay sauciness is gone now, that useful shield she has used to guard her eyes from telling him her heart's true secret too soon—Helen Greaves is not the girl to let herself be won unwooed. She sits there now, all her work neglected, gazing out with her tear-laden eyes, wondering will he come again, or will he forget her, and render her wild dreams but idle fancies.

### CHAPTER III.

 HARLIE DENE fairly bounds on shore when at last he is free to escape from the ship. He has no close family ties to compel him in any other direction than his love prompts him; indeed, his almost nearest blood relation is Miss Sophia Demmont, and for her he has surely no warmer feeling than that she inhabits the same dwelling which holds his promised wife, his love. She is

nothing very near, either, in point of consanguinity, although she always distinctly claims him as her dear nephew. He is, indeed, singularly alone in the world: he may rush off with what impetuosity he will to his darling, clasp her to his beating heart, and then seek out his only close friend, Nol Steers. At present he is in a fever of unrest. He has had no line, no word, for so long, he little knows the misery he has mercifully escaped in finding himself homeward bound and just missing English letters in that hurried start.

The well-remembered house at Hyde Park Corner is soon reached. Alas! before Noland Steers can meet him, to stay his steps, he stands in the familiar drawing-room, pacing its length with hurried, impatient strides. Will she never come? Yes, the door is opened slowly, as if reluctantly, and a tall, slight figure enters with widely strained eyes, full of intense feeling, and shining with saddest, pitying tears.

In one moment it is clasped in his glad arms, pressed vehemently to his broad, honest breast, with a cry wrung straight from his full heart. "My own darling! My Alice! My love! my love!"

A hurried, frightened gasp, a choking cry, and a small trembling hand pushes him from her, and the shaking lips echo a sad, "Oh, Charlie, do you not know? It is not Alice; I am Rose. Oh, do you not know?"

"Know what?" cries the young fellow, thoroughly mystified and aghast now in his turn; "you Rose?" he asks—"the little Rose I left a child barely four years ago! I cannot believe my eyes. Are you joking? Don't trifle with me; I cannot be so mistaken—you are Alice"—he half smiles. "Oh, my love, have pity on me! I hunger for you so. Come, Alice"—and he holds out his arms once more; but there is only wondering sorrow, frightened fear, and deepest shame in the face before him. He sees now it is not Alice's face, though strangely like it; and again the sweet voice shakes ominously as she says—

"Indeed, I am Rose. I suppose I am grown like Alice was when you left us."

"Well," he says, with a hearty laugh, which jars on her inexpressibly, "I suppose I must apologise for my abrupt greeting"—and a deep flush lies the handsome, manly face, and the lighthearted, happy laugh, that makes poor Rose Kervin quiver with agony, dies away as he sees the trouble in her eyes. A dim fear, which yet he strives to cast away, begins to oppress him; and all she can think is that he does not know—that he is in com-

plete ignorance of all that has happened. How shall she tell him? she wonders vaguely. Where had all those letters gone which she knows were sent to him? She had come down prepared to hear his reproaches, to witness his sorrow, to console, to explain, and to exonerate her sister as far as she could. All this she had solemnly promised Alice she would do; but for this utter ignorance on his part she was not prepared; and she feels nervous and miserable, and wonders however she can tell him. Every word that should be uttered dies on her tongue ere it can be formed into speech.

"And I have come only to find my love away! Is she from home?"

"Yes—no—yes, she is away. Oh, Charlie dear, do you not know? I am so sorry for you."

Then his fears take shape, and he asks hurriedly, "She is ill, and you have kept it from me!"

The girl's tears burst out in a very tempest of sobs. "Yes," she cries, heartbroken, "she is very ill. We heard only this morning. Papa and I are going to her."

"And I too. Now, Rose dear, only tell me where they have taken my darling." He lays his hand firmly on the girl's shoulders, as she kneels by a small table in front of him, shaking with sobs. "Don't sob so, Rose; all will be well now that I have come."

"Oh," she cries, "you don't know. Alice is—she is—" But at this moment Miss Sophia Demmont enters the room, having just come in from her morning constitutional. At a glance she sees the state of affairs—as she thinks, at least. She presents her lean, hard cheek for Charlie's nephewly salute, and says—

"Rose, my dear, it is no use for you to give way so excessively."

"She is ill?" he asks his aunt vaguely.

"Alice? Yes; she has been, it seems, ever since her marriage—"

At this moment, by one of those strange chances which do occur in this world, the footman announces—"Mr. Noland Steers, ma'am." And so Charlie Dene, in the first moment of his mad misery, can grasp the hand so firmly held out to him of his closest friend.

"How I had hoped to have reached you, old man, before you came here!" he says, and he still keeps Charlie's hand in a firm clasp.

"Yes, before I came," mutters Charlie, in a thick, hoarse voice. He is mad with bewilderment and sudden pain. He feels all his manliness forsaking him, and wonders if he is going to lose consciousness.

Yes, for all he can do to avert it. Noland Steers only catches him in time to prevent him falling heavily to the ground.

"What! did he not know?" asks Miss Sophia, frightened to see a strong man so thoroughly helpless. "Dear me, I will get some brandy, shall I?" she asks. "Dear me, I thought men were so much stronger than this," she goes on, looking at the set, white insensible face before her.

"Perhaps you thought, madam, that men have no feelings to be shocked—no feelings to be outraged by a woman's faithlessness and perfidy," says Noland. He is annoyed at the woman's helplessness, and irritated by her very ugliness as she stands before him gazing stupidly at his friend in such sorry plight.

Rose pushes her aside, kneels down and takes the head of the unconscious man on her arm, and bathes his forehead with some strong aromatic vinegar which she has rushed to fetch; and presently the eyes unclose and look earnestly at her. With a shudder, all his misery seems to rush upon his knowledge.

"Where am I?" he asks, and makes a violent effort to regain self-consciousness. "Tell me all now," he says. "I can bear it. It was the sudden shock that unnerved me."

It was a difficult task for sweet Rose Kervin to tell that story before the stony eyes of Miss Sophia, and the stern, uncompromising glance of Noland Steers; and she so dearly loves her sister, and that sister is ill, perhaps even ill unto death now at the present moment in a foreign land. Charlie Dene sees her agitation, and his own grief is put aside to aid her and to comfort her.

"Don't cry so, dear Rose. I shall never blame Alice. She was and is my dearest love; she would have been true to me if they would have let her. Go to her, and in pity's name tell her what I say. Make her know that I mean it fully. Although I may never see her more, I reverence her memory, and do not blame her. She was but a weak woman among cruel, hard circumstances. Go, tell her I forgive her from my very heart. And now, Noland," he asks, turning to him, "will you come with me?"

\* \* \* \*

"And about yourself, old fellow?" asks Charlie, later on into that same night.

"The last letter I had told me the ill news. How are you getting over it? You look well—better, I think, than I ever saw you. And this Miss Hunter, what is she like?"

"More than I can tell you, Dene. I have never seen her since the old days

You remember the last time I saw the old curmudgeon, she was away at a foreign school, so I missed her ladyship. They say she is a beauty."

"Where is she now?"

"Travelling with the D'Almains, Frank Helstone tells me. She is due at Castle Delmar for the double wedding the third week in September."

"Ah, I'm glad Frank has his heart's desire; he was always fond of Rose Delmar from a boy. Is she as pretty and as shy as ever?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"And so Miss Helstone is to be married at last! She was a beautiful girl. The last time I saw her was the very night before I sailed, at the Coventrys' ball. She was looking splendid. I thought she would have been married ages ago. Who is this Darlingford?"

"Oh, a man very high in the profession."

"The profession!" laughs Charlie Dene.

"Well, in our profession, then, if I may say so," answers Noland, with a little flush. "He is a good deal older than her—an eminent Q.C., and likely soon to be exalted to the woolsack."

"And so it is to be a double wedding? Castle Delmar will be in a state of flutter."

"Yes, I suppose so."

But Charlie Dene sees his friend's thoughts are not at Castle Delmar. He looks keenly at him as he sits with half-closed eyes, leaning back in an immense lounging chair. "You have not seen Miss Hunter, then?" he says.

"No," answers the other, glancing up to find his friend's eyes bent questioningly upon him. "Why?"

"Who is it that you are in love with, then, old man?"

"I? Good gracious, Dene, to whatever conclusions are you jumping now? For Heaven's sake, what made you ask such a ridiculous question? and of me, of all people in the world!"

But Charlie's thoughts have wandered far away, and presently he raises his hand and shields his eyes from the firelight, and from Nol's view; and Noland respects his silence, and in his heart at the moment he curses all women and their fickleness. They each sit silent—in a silence that shows only too plainly their entire oneness. Each thinks his own thoughts; and before Noland's mind a young form with merry, defiant eyes, sitting on a high point of rock, rises, and he fancies the defiant light is gone, leaving only tenderness and yielding womanliness. Shall he return? Will she be there? he wonders; and a scrap of some old song meanders into his memory—

"Beware of her fair hair——"

Yes, something like that.

"Beware of her fair hair, for she excels All women in the magic of her locks; And if she winds them round a young man's heart, She will not ever let him go again."

\* \* \* \* \*

The days are speeding away at Castle Delmar in one perpetual round of country gaiety, each week filled up by picnics, tennis parties, riding excursions—to say nothing of a few stately dinner-parties and some evening dances. And amongst it all the preparations for the double wedding go on apace.

Mrs. Delmar, an aunt of its little mistress, who has always made the Castle her home, and taken a mother's place as far as her health would permit to the two girls, finds the commotion tiring and perplexing, and wonders vaguely when it will be over, and she free to return to her usual quiet existence; but her heart is a large, kindly organ, and she makes every exertion in the present crisis that all things ordered by the Castle's real mistress should go smoothly.

Rose Delmar, the shy *châtelaine* of the Castle, is an ecstatic little bride-elect. She hides none of her happiness or sweet content under a bushel. She absolutely beams rays of joy on her surroundings, and would, if she could, lengthen out each happy day into even a fuller measure. She is a little afraid of Ralph Darlingford when he pays his hurried visits, and declares that he is even more alarming than Noland Steers; but Rose Helstone is content, and, to judge by her glorified radiance of womanly beauty, something more than content. Rose Delmar is fain to confess they will be a handsome pair—this to Frank—as they stand at a large oriel window in that young lady's own morning-room, watching the couple as they cross the lawn below, walking quietly along, side by side—as soberly, Rose says, as any judge.

"It is not in that sister of mine to be such a goose as my Rose," he laughs. "She is far too self-contained."

"Perhaps you would like me to practise self-containment," she replies, a little piqued, at which Frank kisses her bright face, saying, with a horrified look—

"Good gracious! no, my darling! By-the-bye, Rose," he says presently, "what I came here for was to tell you that I heard from Steers this morning; he is in town."

"Oh," says Rose, demurely, "is that what you came for? What a long time you have hindered me before saying it.

Let go my ear, sir, you hurt. I believe your fingers are made of iron. So I suppose," she continues, "he is getting tired at last of that horrid law-reading. I wish you would ask him to come down and see us."

"I thought you were afraid of him Fairy."

"Not I," she laughs. "I like him and respect him intensely, as a friend, only I should be afraid of him as a husband."

"You would not be able to bully him and order him round, as you do me."

"No," she answers demurely; "I could not fancy any woman ordering Noland Steers round; but still I want him to come here now, because I know you feel horribly dull sometimes, and he is such a friend of yours; and I know it would give you pleasure. I mean to make myself like all your friends; they must all feel at home at Castle Delmar, and you must have that delicious old billiard-room repainted and fitted up, and let us all come in and play whenever we want to. Oh, let us go now, dear," she says gleefully, "and decide on the colour of the paint, paper, leather, cloths, and things for it."

"Stop a bit, dear," says Frank. "I can't be hustled round so; it is much too hot. Do you know that Charlie Dene has come home?"

"No. Has he?" she asks, with a pained surprise, coming close to his side. "Oh, poor Charlie, I wonder how he takes it! I do feel so sorry for him; it is all dreadfully sad," and she leans her face against his shoulder, and says quietly: "Poor Alice is, as I told you, so ill, and uncle and Rose are going to Florence to be with her. I am afraid she must be very bad. She was never strong; and now, poor darling! she is so ill; they say the heat is killing her. It is not the heat. Oh, Frank," she whispers, "she was so fond of Charlie; it was very cruel, horribly cruel, to make her marry that man, with his vile money. I think uncle will see it was now; we will go and see her during our tour, won't we?" she asks wistfully.

Frank hastens to fall in with this idea, as he does with any such emanating from his shy love. "Noland tells me that Dene had reached home not knowing of the marriage, and in full belief of Alice's truth, and of being married at once, since he is to be appointed to a post captaincy," he says, "That's the worst of it; it must have been an awful blow."

"Oh, it was too cruel! too monstrous! Poor fellow!" she sobs. "Oh, Frank dear, fancy if it had been you!"

"I can't fancy anything so fearful, luckily. I think I should go shrieking

mad right off," he laughs, hoping to cheer her up, as he sees she is deeply affected. They sit in that bright, cosy room, and talk at length over the matter in all its bearings, and finally Frank promises to ask both Noland Steers and Charlie Dene to come to Castle Delmar.

"Write at once, dear," says Rose, impetuously; "and I will go and write some notes for you to enclose. They *must* come!"

"I only hope Steers won't be afraid of meeting Rose Hunter," says Frank, thoughtfully. "You know I told you how stubborn he was on this point, and he may think it probable."

"But didn't you tell him in your last letter that she was travelling with the D'Almains?"

"Did I?"

"I told you to do so."

"Oh, well, then, I daresay I did."

"Well, anyhow, Frank, you can just put it in now. Work it in somehow; or if it comes to that, since you are such close friends, say straight out he need not be afraid of that, or stay away from here on such account, for she is not coming till the day before the wedding. It is horrid of her, but she has fixed it so; and she is just as stubborn in her ways as he is. She might just as well have had a week with us before; she won't see any of my dresses or anything, and her taste is so perfect. She designed those lovely dresses we wore at Alice's wedding, you know."

"Yes, she's a jolly girl. I wish she were coming."

"Tiresome things, they both are; they might just as well meet each other and fall in love, and get properly married, like other sensible people"—at which pettish oration Frank laughs heartily, and they both go off to write the words that shall summon the two men to Castle Delmar.

Presently Rose peeps her head in round the library door, and says, in a rather lugubrious voice, "Oh, Frank, do you think I ought to ask Miss Demmont? She is Charlie Dene's aunt, you know, and when uncle and Rose go away she will be all alone."

"The deuce she will!" exclaims Frank, biting the end of his pen with perplexity; but a happy thought strikes him. "Depend upon it, she has to mind the house, dear, and could not leave. It would only be an empty compliment to ask her. She'll be safe enough alone; nobody will want to run away with her."

"You horrid thing!" says Rose, still dubious. "I think, though, I had better consult Rose. Where is she?"

"Spooning in the conservatory with Darlingford. They don't want you. You go and write your notes, there's a good girl, and do as I bid you, or I'll kiss you all up into little bits."

At this awful threat she vanishes, and comes back presently, saying, "I haven't said a word about her; of course, I am not supposed to know she is not going with them to Alice, am I?"

"Of course not, dear," answers Frank, decidedly, taking the two delicate little notes, and slipping them into his own letter, and rapidly sticking up the envelope.

To her great delight she receives letters of acceptance from both men, a grateful one from Charlie, a more reserved one, and accepting for a conditionally short time, from Noland Steers. She is quite nervously anxious as the hours draw near when they may expect them, and she shows her true sympathy in such tender womanly fashion to Charlie Dene that takes much of the edge off his bitterness. With consummate tact she says no word to Noland Steers of Rose Hunter, but once or twice mentions her name quite casually to others in his hearing.

Both men think how much more there is in little Rose Delmar than they had thought, and consider Frank Helstone an exceptionally lucky fellow; and love had developed this young girl in a most wonderful manner; she could even feel it herself, and put it down in confidence with Rose Helstone to having always been so repressed by her feeling of having given her love unsought, and to the smothered pain of thinking Frank's bestowed elsewhere. She owned it was a never-ending mystery to her how they ever could have misunderstood each other so long, and laughingly summed it up as too ridiculous.

"What is too ridiculous, Miss Delmar?" asks Ralph Darlingford, entering at the moment, and Rose blushes vividly, and wonders to see so merry a twinkle in Ralph's deep-set eyes. But she makes no answer, only that she must run away and leave them, for that hundreds of things require her attention—the days are not half long enough.

"And yet you lengthen them considerably," he says, still with the quiet appreciative twinkle in his eye, and seeing her wondering look, he quotes—

"The best of all ways to lengthen our days  
Is to steal a few hours from the night,  
My love!"

Then she knows he is alluding to having met her with Frank late last night, as he

was smoking his last cigar. And she blushes again, and laughs merrily, and feels nearer to not being afraid of Ralph Darlingford than ever she was before; and despite her press of many cares, she finds time to go into the library and ruffle up Frank's hair, pinch his ears, kiss his forehead, and tell him that wonders will never cease, for Ralph Darlingford has perpetrated a joke.

As Fate would have it, Noland Steers cannot leave Castle Delmar at the end of the short time he has stipulated; in leaping a fence, to his immense disgust, he has sprained his foot, only slightly, perhaps, still sufficient to be abominably disagreeable, since it ties him to a sofa and forbids all hope of travelling; and Rose Delmar declares it would be madness to attempt it. And besides," she adds, "I can't see what you want to hurry away for to that wretched dead-alive little place, where you don't know a soul, and where there is just nothing, as you say yourself, but the cliffs and the sea to look at, and nobody to talk to beyond the fishermen and a contumacious parson; and as for law-books, I am sure there are heaps in the library, dusty old things. I am sure Mr. Darlingford will be kind enough to look you out some, and I will have them well beaten and clapped together to get the dust out, and then you can have them here, and we will all promise to leave you in quiet to them for so many hours each day."

"A very different thing that, though, Miss Delmar, to hard reading in my bare little room at Lintrock."

"Well," she laughs, "I can't offer to bring the room here for you; but if you like I will have this one dismantled a bit."

He is obliged, for all his inward vexation, to laugh at the merry girl; and her reasoning being perfectly incontrovertible, he has nothing more to say, since he can not give vent to his feelings and say ho nestly it is not for all this he so desires to be gone, but for the sake of a sweet maiden with defiant blue eyes, that can yet look sad, and to see once more the sheen of her fair, fair hair that has wound itself round his heart—to feel himself once more under the magic of her spell.

And day after day he lies restlessly there, abusing his fate to be "tied by the leg," and he perplexes his mind with irritating persistency as to whether *she* will still be at Lintrock when he can get permission to move. In his restlessness he gives his foot many an awkward twist that throws back the probability.

## CHAPTER IV.

 SOLERIDGE says that "Chance is but the pseudonym of God for those particular cases which He does not choose to subscribe openly with His own sign manual." The words run through Noland Steers's mind, but bring him no ease to his vexation when he finds, on his return to Lintrock, that no lights burn in the cliff cottage that had held his love. It is late when the lumbering old stage sets him down at his own quarters at the old-world hostelry in the village, but not too late for him to walk out to the near cliff under the high-sailing moon—to be just that much nearer to her whom he knows now, past all doubt, is the love of his life. There he stands in the cool summer night, and realises, with a blank feeling of despair, that she is gone.

"The moon charms the watery world below,  
Wakes the still seas, and makes them ebb and flow."

But it cannot soothe his sharp pain or take off the keen edge of his bitter disappointment. Wh<sup>o</sup> had he rushed away from her that summer morning barely a month ago, with no word of love spoken between them? Wh<sup>o</sup> had he been so sure of returning at once, and to find her there? and by a horrible concatenation of circumstances he had been hindered and tormented, till—now he returns only to find her gone?

Thus do mortals rave incontinently over their short-sighted blindness when it has apparently bereft them of what earthly blessings they most desire. And the blessing o' this girl's love seems more desirable to Noland Steers than he could himself have deemed possible, now that the fruition of his hopes seems to fade away into some dim vista. A blank seems to come down as it were from some illimitable power in the vast heavens above him, and to settle on his spirit with a cold chill.

There lay the old grey fishing village below him, slumbering in the tranquil liquid light of the full harvest-moon that was, too, flooding the wide sea at his feet with a million shifting opal tints. No sound but the low calling of that sea, murmuring its love-tale to the still, rocky beach in tiny soft, rippling sentences, then receding, lulling itself into yet deeper quietude. The cold beams fell on the many boats of the hardy fishers drawn high on to the sheltering beach, fell, too, on the lonely, silent cottage at his side, which stood now in its unlighted solitude as a protest of his folly in having so blindly trusted to Fate—in leaving so much to chance. With a sudden gust of unreason-

ing passion, he wonders what she must have thought of him.

In the reaction of this feeling, a hot flush of angry shame on his brow, he rapidly leaves the quiet of the cliff-top and seeks his own bare little room in the inn at Lintrock.

"I thought, sir, you were gone to visit the kelpies on the Lintrock," says the landlord, who is waiting his return by the open door, before retiring for the night. "I saw your figure standing out against the sky-line up yonder."

"Ah, I was moonstruck, Pritchard, and couldn't get away. Sorry, though, I have kept you up. Good-night!"

"Never mind about that, Mister Steers, nohow. Only too glad to see you back again," says the man, cordially. "We can't afford to lose folks when they do come to Lintrock. Mrs. Greaves and the young girl who paints the pictures are gone, too, but they're coming back again."

"Oh, are they?" asks Noland, and the eagerness of his glad tone does not escape he shrewd notice of the 'cute Welshman.'

"Oh, yes, they're coming back. Don't know just when; only for a little while, hough, to get a subj- ct for another picture out of the east side of the Lintrock. But he's a clever young girl with her pencil."

"Where have they gone. Do you know?"

"Oh, first to Gloucester, Mister Noland—all about some picture of hers; they had a telegram sharp, as how she had to go at once to the firm who buys them. Something good, I guess, for she seemed peculiar jubilant when they went off."

"Oh!" and this time there is a depressed sound in the tones, that also does not escape Pritchard, so he adds, "And she told me herself that they should come back some time after her business was over."

"Oh!" and there is a considerable degree more contentment and hope in the one.

"That'll work itself, to my mind anyhow. A fine 'andsome pair they'll be, too." This is Pritchard's thought as the worthy man seeks his nightly rest with the soothing sensation of having performed a praiseworthy action and furthered a desirable end.

\* \* \* \* \*

Charlie Dene has come up to town with Noland Steers to transact business for himself relative to his post captaincy, and to call on his Aunt Sophia. He finds that lady quite alone in the large house at Hyde Park Corner, but by no means unhappy about that; she declares that she has too much to occupy herself with to give way to loneliness, and that it is only ridiculous,

sentimental, lazy women, who make complaint of this, hoping to extract pity when they should only expect scorn. She looks, Charlie thinks, particularly ugly just then, and as unlikely a subject to get pity from any one as could well be imagined; yet, having a kind heart, he does feel himself pitying her all the same—after a fashion.

He finds that she has had a letter from Rose, in which she tells her they have safely arrived at Florence, and that Alice is far too ill for her to think of returning to fulfil her part of bridesmaid at the approaching weddings at Castle Delmar, and that she has by the same post written to that effect to both the brides. Then follow some details, loving and earnest in their sad tone, relative to Alice, and a kindly message for Charlie Dene. His aunt has given him the letter to read, and there are tears in her own faded eyes when she accords him the permission he asks for, to keep it.

That tear does much for Miss Sophia Demmont; it softens Charlie's heart towards her; he thinks in his kindheartedness that there must be some goodness and kind feeling hidden away under the ungracefulness of her outward seeming, and he generously feels that her case is a hard one for a woman, that she must be desolate in her present loneliness; and with the thought comes the unselfish impulse to devote himself to her during his stay in town.

With a frankhearted kindness he asks her to go out with him and take a round of some of the old sights of London that used to charm him as a boy. "Do you mind," he asks, "taking a tour with me round the Zoo?"

He feels repaid when he sees the real pleasure his words call up, and the alacrity with which Miss Sophia departs to accoutre herself for the expedition. With all a sailor's don't-care-ish-ness, he walks bravely along with her through the crowded park; then presently, chartering a cab, they are well on their homeward way, he being under further promise to call for her at eight to accompany her to the opera. Verily, it is a red-letter day for Miss Sophia Demmont.

"I think I shall run down to Lintrock and see Steers—stay with him a week, if he'll put me up—before I return to Castle Delmar. He doesn't seem to me to write in very good spirits," says Charlie in the course of the evening.

"He is the kind of man that wants everything to run exactly as he pleases before he can be content—one of that kind that thinks the world should shape itself

to his especial needs, and that the people in it should prostrate themselves before his requirements," and then Miss Sophia draws her cloak round her thin shoulders, and the veins in her long neck have to Charlie the unpleasant suggestiveness of strangulation.

As she bows to some people near them, one of the ladies leans across, and some conversation ensues, in which Charlie can hear inquiries for poor, dear Lady Waugh, mingled with hopes that dear Lady Rose will soon send home good news; then an intimation that her dear girls are going to be bridesmaids to Miss Helstone at the double wedding; then something is said about that fascinating Rose Hunter, &c., &c.; but the crashes of the orchestra drop into comparative silence, the curtain is rising, and they must leave off talking.

Charlie Dene sits it out without seeing aught of coherency in the mimic scene before him; he has forgotten the very opera it is they are witnessing; his thoughts have gone backward, dwelling on his sorrows—and they are sad thoughts and bitter. The ungenerous speech of his aunt relative to Noland Steers grates on his friendly senses, and undoes much for that lady which her previous sympathetic tear had effected. He wonders why he is here at all, in this garish scene, with his sad heart and his troubled thoughts—wonders, and begins to heartily repent him of his act. He is not in a friendly mood towards his aunt, when presently, in an interval, she turns towards him and says—

"You know I don't like Mr. Steers. I cannot see what there is to admire in him; but of course"—seeing a look in his eyes that warned her—"he is a great friend of yours, and I know but very little of him."

"Exactly so," answers her nephew somewhat coldly. "Noland Steers is one of the very best of fellows in every sense of the word, thoroughly manly, and not easily led by every wind that blows. Perhaps," he adds, for he does not want to stamp too hardly on her prejudices, "he is a little too intolerant of the opinions of other people, and that may render him not easily understood by people who know little of him. He is a man you want to know well!"

"Well," she says, "I am sure I was as sorry as anybody to hear of this disappointment in regard to that disgraceful will."

"You are right there," answers Charlie, greatly mollified, "it was disgraceful; and to leave a girl in such a position was more disgraceful still. By-the-bye, is she a nice girl? You know her, I think. How came he to leave the money to her at all?"

"Just because he was an old idiot, and

in his youth it seemed had loved her mother ; so he must needs take her child and educate her, and then leave her his money and try to force Noland Steers (who decidedly had the right to it, having been partly gained through his own father, who was some kind of partner with him) to marry her."

"Yes, yes ; I know all that ; but I thought this Rose Hunter was a niece o' his."

"So I believe she was, but I don't exactly know how—through some offshoot of the family on her mother's side, I think."

"She is very beautiful, isn't she?"

"Yes, I suppose so ; but she is not a girl I like—she is too frivolous and too fond of asserting her own opinions in the face of elder and wiser people. She is not at all the companion I should desire for Lady Rose, and I feel vexed they have entered lately into such close friendship. She is a girl who must be in the first swim of everything ; she can even shoot, I believe, and can ride any horse that no other woman would dare mount ; and she is filled with all sorts of foreign notions except any that would induce a girl to be retiring and modest."

"Is she immodest, then ?" asks Charlie, amused, for he can easily detect the spleen that prompts his aunt's remarks, and besides, he has already heard so much of Rose Hunter at Castle Delmar that he is prepared to see her very different than Miss Sophia would suggest.

He is not sorry when he is alone for the night, and free of her company ; he declines her invitation to supper with an alacrity that astonishes himself. He is half inclined to start off to Lintrock on the morrow ; he feels morally certain that all is not well with his friend Nol, and he has a shrewd suspicion that some love-affair is at the bottom of it ; but whatever it may be, he is equally assured it is not running smoothly, and he wonders as he muses whether, by going unannounced, he would be quite welcome. He has a certain delicacy about it, since Nol has not made any confidant of him in the matter ; and yet he has not absolutely denied that he is in this trouble and perplexity.

## CHAPTER V.

**S**OME evil spirit is playing the very deuce, he declares, with his concentration of ideas and his desire for study ; and Noland Steers rises from the littered table before him and goes to the open window. One thought

suggests itself—" Go back to your books ; " another, " Come out and revel in blessed idleness." His hat is close to him on the broad sill, and the very propinquity, no doubt, settles the question, for he mechanically puts it on, and leaves the room, after assuring himself that he is well provided with cigars and lights. He has been back now a week—a long, tiresome week ; and still Helen Greaves has not returned to Lintrock : still the cottage on the cliff is empty save for the fisher inhabitants who are its caretakers. His beautiful Helen, more beautiful to him than was ever Helen of Troy to the Trojans of old, is not there. He bends his steps in the western direction, an unaccustomed route, since it leads him only to the retired cove where he usually resorts for his early morning swim ; he throws himself on the greensward near a primitive little scrap of a "look-out," or coastguard station, tilts his hat over his eyes, and no doubt muses on the mutability of human affairs in general.

A wasp hovers over his prostrate head, passes and re-passes in its aerial flight, till it makes a spiteful dab at the handsome nose on which the hat is tilted. It rouses its owner, who sits up and finds the wasp was decidedly justified, since he has been intruding on its domains, as evidenced by several more in a high state of flurry issuing from a mound near which he had leaned. The sun is dazzling to his eyes, weak from the darkened shade of the hat ; everything looks in a white haze, a quivering indistinctness of summer heat ; the waters below him are one sheet of wide, smooth, blinding light : scarcely a ripple is on its surface—it might be a sheet of burnished glass. The rock that stands at the entrance o the cove is almost covered, the tide is rising fast.

He glances at his watch, then looks towards the rock again, as he prepares to find another resting-place free of wasps' nests ; his eyes are recovering themselves now : surely there is something moving on that rock, and yet no boat is near ! He rises o his feet and shades his eyes with his two hands, and gazes intently at the far rock—his usual limit to his early swim, so he is very familiar with its general appearance ; and it certainly has no tints of vivid crimson, or white, or gold, and yet all these seem now to reflect themselves from its summit.

What on earth can it be? Now it is perfectly still ; and he is just stretching his arms vigorously in a rousing manner familiar to him when tramping those high, lonely rocks, and determining to give it up, when an old sailor nearing him says—

"Drabbut that gel ! she'll drown herself one o' these days to a dead certainty. Think, sor, we'd better send a boat out ? The tide's risin' fast. She's a darin' young hussy to go out so fur, let alone bidin' there such a mortal time."

"What is it?" asks Noland, bewildered.

"A girl?"

"Ay, a gel," answers the old man, testily, but looking anxious, nevertheless, as he peers through his glass.

"Who is it, for goodness sake? What woman could swim so far?"

"She's that 'ere young miss, come back again, sor, to my brother Sam's cotta'e;" and he flips his fingers in the direction intimated.

"When did they return?" asks Noland, hurriedly.

"Oh, late last night, same coach as you comed by last week ; and here's she up to her old tricks agen a'ready. Drabbut her ! I say, she allers freightens me into fiddle-strings."

"That's very bad," laughs Noland, suddenly jubilant that his love, his Helen, has come back.

But the testy old sailor resents the laugh.

"Ah, sor, you may laugh ; but if she gits drowned we shall laugh to another tune, I'm thinking, and t'other side o' our mouths."

"Drowned, Pattison!" echoes Noland,aghast at the idea.

"Ay, drowned. How do she know the current as swirls round that ere rock even at this calm time o' year? And there she is, bless yer, a-lying on it, altogether forgettin' that she's a good bit out o' her depth, and that the tide's a slinkin' up to the full every blessed minute."

"Good Heavens!" echoes Noland, now fully alive to his darling's danger ; "perhaps she is ill or exhausted. Something must be done immediately."

"Ay, ay; mebbe that's it ; 'tis a big swim out there, though."

Even as he speaks the swelling, glittering sea flashes almost to the summit of the rock on which she still lies ; but now she moves into a sitting posture, and is apparently gazing out to sea, then she stands up and shades her eyes with her hand, taking a far-reaching glance, and once more she sinks on to the rock, but not now in a recumbent position ; she kneels and throws out her white arms, flings back the masses of her bright gold hair, and a faint sound is borne over the still waters that seems to Noland Steers to savour only of a cry for help. It rings out clearly across the summer sea in the mid-day summer stillness, "Aid me ! Aid me !

Aid me !" it seems to say. Oh, Heaven, she sees her danger now, poor little beautiful darling ! and Noland Steers throws off his coat, his waistcoat, flings his collar and tie to the winds, and rushes off down the cliff side.

"Ay, ay, sor, you'll just do it if you swims hard ; we'll foller in a boat in a brace o' shakes, soon as I can git down to 'e east shore," says the old fisherman.

Noland makes the descent to the beach below quickly enough ; any sudden emergency always nerves him to vigorous action. He takes a strong, mighty run into the still sea, and gets thus a good impetus for his swim. Manfully, with a sweeping side stroke, he cleaves the shining waters ; he can see in the distance the rock, and that she is still on it ; he can see the figure kneeling, sharply defined against the blue sky—a mass of crimson and gold, that makes his eyes ache. Will he reach her in time? Once more the soft cry rings clearly out, "Aid me ! Aid me ! Aid me !" He swims his hardest ; he must reach that rock in time to save his darling ; but he can already feel the treacherous under-swirl that the old boatman had spoken of.

He raises himself and takes a comprehensive glance, to judge of the distance and his time ; and he sees the girl is kneeling, with her back partially to the shore and the coming succour, and her voice still rings out, "Aid me !" But no, it is a young, strong, clear voice, only singing "Aidé, Aidé, Aidé !" and now he can distinguish the musical cadence of the "Blue Alsatian Mountains" in the lower notes. The deuce ! is his first thought, then a great fear settles at his heart as he thinks how near she is to a cruel death—in such imminent danger and yet so ignorant of it.

He settles once more to his stroke, and as he nears the rock he sees the extreme top is less covered than he thought ; hence her ignorance as yet of her danger.

"Keep still !" he shouts, "I will save you."

The sweet voice stops singing, and the face he loves so madly turns full towards him, and a musical laugh rings out on the morning air. With a few vigorous strokes he nears the rock, and raises his eyes to the bright, laughing, careless face—no knowledge of danger there—no fear whatever !

"You look excited, Mr. Steers ! Had you not better come up and rest awhile before taking your return swim?" Noland Steers certainly has never felt such a fool in his life, and yet he is angry.

"You can get up nicely round here," she

says demurely. "Isn't the water deliciously cool to-day?"

"Do you know," he asks, as he gains the point she indicates, and struggles to a place beside her, "that you are far out of your depth?"

"Am I?" still demurely.

"Yes, I am not joking; the tide is almost at its height, and you are in great danger. Perhaps you are unaware of its depth here?"

"Oh, depth is nothing to me; I like depth."

He feels dreadfully taken back, as people do who have incontinently, on a sudden impulse, done some egregiously good-natured, not to say heroic, action that turns out to be utterly uncalled for. "Perhaps you are deep yourself, and so 'like meets like,'" he says inconsequently, for he is angry that he feels himself in such a false position.

"There is no 'perhaps' about it," she says, with utmost coolness; "that is just what I am—awfully deep. Are you?" she asks innocently.

For the life of him he cannot help laughing, and they both join in a hearty burst of merriment; their position is too utterly ridiculous to do ought else, in fact; it would be too absurd to attempt to keep up a dignified behaviour, clinging like limpets to a rock rapidly becoming submerged in a summer sea.

"Did you think I was swimming out here for pleasure, Miss Greaves?" he asks, just a little nettled at her ease.

"Couldn't think," she laughs. "I thought it awfully cool of you to come to my rock, and I went on singing to lure you along, like the sirens of the Lorelei, intending then to slip off myself on the other side, till I heard your earnest shout to me to hold on—then I perceived your noble purpose," and once more she goes off into uncontrollable fits of girlish laughter as she looks at his rueful appearance generally. The soft, limpid water nearly covers the flat shelving top of the rock now.

"Well," she asks, taking a critical survey of their position, "are you rested? because, with your permission, you may consider your audience at an end; after you, please"—and she motions him to precede her.

"No," she says decidedly, "there is far more swell than you think at high tide round this rock; we will go together."

"Is that how you intend to speak to the rich young lady I hear you are going to marry?" she asks quietly.

He stares at her in astonishment, and she

kindly explains—"I have been away, you know, and I heard it quite casually."

"Did you? I am not going to marry any rich young lady," he says, with sudden heat, and a haughty colour flushes his handsome face.

"Oh! I thought—I heard—I was told—"

"Yes?" he says, coldly.

"Oh, I understood, Mr. Steers, that it was no question of choice, that it was merely a point of—of—money."

"Exactly; you heard aright, so far as it goes. Briefly, then, my old guardian, whom I had not seen for over a dozen years, left me a sharer in his immense fortune on condition that I should marry a certain Miss Hunter, a young, frivolous girl whom I had not seen ever since she was an impudent mite of five."

"And failing your doing this?" she asks, interested.

"It goes to her entirely."

"The designing little wretch!" she says, with sympathising heat.

"No, I don't feel like that—I have heard she is as disgusted as I am."

"Do you believe that?" asks she, incredulously, then, "Is she pretty?"

"Good Heavens! I neither know nor care. I have washed my hands of the whole concern. I am what I told you, a comparatively poor man, but a free one."

She laughs bewilderingly, "*L'homme propose*, you know," she says archly. But he looks now the impersonation of haughtiness, and she feels she has gone a little too far in thus trenching on the private affairs of an almost stranger.

"I beg your pardon," she says, with a sudden humbleness of tone.

"Oh, don't mention it, Miss Greaves; but will you understand that with my position here all this has nothing whatever to do—that I shall never marry any woman except for love—that I shall never marry a rich woman, because—you are poor, are you not?" he asks.

"As Job," she answers, with a comic return of the demureness that is so irritating to him.

"Because, then, I love a poor one," he adds.

She shivers, and now cannot meet his eyes; a sudden shame seems to possess her; but once more some ridiculous thought takes hold of her; her humbleness is fled, she is again the same bright, saucy, defiant girl who has haunted him for ever during these later weeks, when he had been living a separate existence, his body elsewhere, his soul, his mind at Lint-rock.

"I don't know," she says now, with

comical propriety, "whether you are aware that we are probably outraging all decorum by remaining here together; remember the Lintrockians are not Trouvillians; and, besides a wretched boat has put off from shore. If you won't go first, I must."

"Stay one moment, Miss Greaves—Helen," and he catches her hand as she endeavours to rise from her kneeling position. "I came here with the intention of saving your life, perhaps because I knew in a flash of time as I saw your supposed danger that your life was everything to me."

"Mr. Steers, do look! the tide is really at its height now; we can barely keep our footing," and she flashes him a glance mutinous, but with that in it which makes his pulses gallop to a mad tune of his fancy's playing; and all further answer he gets, is a swift movement, a crimson flush, and a gleam of white limbs and golden hair, as she takes a rapid, daring header into the deep, gleaming sea; then he sees her appear again with practised movement a long way ahead, making for shore.

## CHAPTER VI.

**H**E is baffled, half frightened for a moment, till he sees her so reappear; considerably amused then, but not daunted at all. That look she has given, that set his pulses throbbing, also answered his heart's question. He no longer doubts her love. Very luxuriously, very leisurely, declining the offer of the boatman to "have a haul in," he swims back to shore; and in due time, in the calm evening hour, he once more asks Helen Greaves for her answer. This time there is no demureness, no defiance, only a shy, sweet, earnest womanliness that dissolves all his preconceived ideas of her, and completes the last links of his bondage.

"Helen, you love me, then?" he says.

The answer comes simply and honestly, with a clear, fearless look—"Yes."

"Thank God!" the words come from his very heart, and are uttered fervently.

She hears them with a half sob almost of pain, and a strong shiver runs through her frame. They are standing alone in the humble room in the cliff cottage; it is neat and delicate, though, in its simple appointments and on all sides are evidences of Helen's work—not as of work for a girl's idle pleasure, but business—hard reality—in its every detail. One almost finished painting stands on the easel, delicate and truthful, and full of a rare

pathos. She has indeed worked into it her *ideas*. The old wreck has a pathetic tenderness in it as of some sentient thing, that has *lived*, but which now lay with all its vitality beaten out—*dead*.

"This must not be sold, Helen," Noland says, looking at it intently, and there is a tremble in his voice. "It must be mine, or at least ours."

She twists her fingers together a little nervously, and says anxiously, "It is disposed of," and then with a little smile almost saucy, again she says, "And you know it is a dismal subject; but," she adds, turning to a portfolio near, "I have kept this sketch for my own self."

He takes it from her and looks at it; it is in exactly the same stage he had last seen it, but the paper is blistered. "What spoiled it?" he asks, puzzled.

"You."

"Me?"

"Yes; when you left me so, I was idiot enough to cry; and—and—it spoilt my sketch, and I had all my work to do over again."

"Darling!" and once more she is clasped in his arms, and with a little gasp of relief she lies still and peacefully.

Presently she says, "And you will never regret marrying a poor girl?"

"Helen!"

"You do not despise me for working for my living?"

He laughs. "I may as well ask you, dear, if you will despise me for working for mine."

"And you will let me follow my profession? I cannot give up my art?"

"Yes"—a little dubiously this—"always considering that you make it second to me."

"Oh, you selfish man! as if that would not necessarily be!" Another confusing pause and entanglement of faces.

"And I cannot see your mother to-day?" at last says Noland.

"Not to trouble her with any momentous questions, sir. She is very good to me; but, as I have told you, she is not my own mother."

"Your father married a second time?"

"Yes. I am my own mistress, you see, so I can do what I like with myself. Do you know that I am three-and-twenty? What will all your grand friends say to your marrying me?"

"I neither know nor care."

"Will you never reproach me for winning you against your will?"

"What do you mean, child?"

"You told me on the rock that I had done so, or something to that effect."

"Silly child! Why, you are absolutely

trembling. I could forgive you anything, everything, for my great love for you."

She springs from him with a sudden saucy laugh, and a gay defiance in her lovely eyes, and catches up a pencil and scrap of drawing paper. "Write that, sir, in so many words, and I can then hold it against you if ever you play me false : it will be a kind of I O U."

He falls in with her playful mood, and does as he is bidden, and the words stand plainly written in his firm, clear hand :

"I forgive you everything, for my great love."

"That is delightful," she says demurely, folding it up and placing it carefully in her well-worn little pocket-book. "And now you must just shake hands and say good-night to my mother, and then you must go—it is late."

\* \* \* \*

Charlie Dene does not go to Lintrock, as he had intended ; such a multitude of commissions are suddenly thrust on him by the bride-elects to execute, if he will be so good-natured since he is in town, that suddenly he finds his time fully occupied ; and then Frank Helstone comes up and joins him, so that his half-formed plan falls through !

Then, too, by remaining in town, he has earliest news from Florence. Each morning he presents himself before his aunt, with a more and more anxious look in his eyes as each letter tells sadder and sadder news.

It is a weary, hopeless time, hearing of his dying love apart from him, another's in a strange land, and his own heart aching with its bitter pain, yet never feeling one shade of resentment ; never once has one hard thought of her ranked in his heart—she is ever to him enshrined as pure and good ; and it never enters into his mind to heap any bitter reproaches on to his dear love—she who must have so much already to suffer.

Charlie Dene's is a particularly gentle, unselfish nature, and it stands him in good stead : he knows well he shall never forget Alice, and he feels thankful that he is thus enabled to think always of her as his in spirit if not in life. Strange to say, he never feels any craving to see her—it would

have destroyed his illusions, it would have pained him to thus cruelly face the fact that he must see her again without taking her to his heart as his. That, he feels, would be the one thing he could not bear—the one farce he could not act. At present he is acting no part, he is simply allowing this cruel fate to carry him along,

he never striving or girding against the inevitable, that he knows his darling, of her own free will, had no hand or part in, to make thus cruel.

He reads Rose's letters, and can see from them that he is not forgotten. They are very sweet to him ; and the knowledge that Rose may still be his sister, as she would have been had he married Alice, is a comfort to him in his loneliness. Frank Helstone enters into some of these feelings with him, and the two men grow very friendly in those busy weeks just before the wedding.

"Old Kervin's a selfish old dog," says Frank, heartily, one day. "You'll see he'll sacrifice Rose precisely the same when the chance comes. Unless," he added, thoughtfully, "you marry her yourself."

He regrets the words the moment they are uttered, and holds out his hand impulsively. "Forgive me, Dene," he says.

\* \* \* \*

"Oh, Frank, I am so glad you have come back ; everything seems in such a flurry. I think, after all, September is a bad month to be married in, it interferes with the shooting so," says Rose Delmar, pitifully.

"We'll arrange it differently next time," laughs Frank.

Rose joins in the laugh, but declares again that she is thankful to have him to take the onus of entertaining off her for the last week, for that poor, dear auntie is almost worn-out with so much unusual strain on her.

"Poor old dear ! she'll have plenty of time to take it out in long rests, after we are gone," he laughs. Then she turns to Charlie Dene and thanks him heartily for doing such numberless commissions for them, and laughingly tells him to help Frank arrange a shooting-party for the next day, and to fix some spot where they can all join them for luncheon.

"Whatever will auntie say to that, Rose, and won't you be too busy to come ?" asks Frank ; but he dodges his head to escape a box on his ears.

Castle Delmar is full of guests, and Miss Sophia Demmont has arrived on the scene, and makes herself very useful in many ways, and wins Rose Delmar's eternal gratitude. The merry, happy girl has strongly opposed the idea of the usual shooting-party for the fortnight of September being given up just because she is going to be married. She had laughingly declared it would be much too absurd and unfair to the birds, so the house filled as usual, and the double

wedding is to be the finale this year to the usual programme.

She rigorously institutes the same gaieties for each evening, has the usual dinner-parties, and accepts all invitations with unflagging energy, but is grateful to Miss Demmont for easing her tired old auntie of much of the needed chaperonage. It is a gay, bustling time, and every one seems infused with her joyous spirit, except, perhaps, the partridges for whom she has been so considerate.

Rose Helstone does her part with her own quiet grace, and everything runs smoothly, and every one in the dear old Castle is happy and content. There would be plenty of time to rest, Rose declares, when they were mooning through Switzerland.

Her bright laugh is echoing down the breakfast-table at some incident from one of her letters, which she is relating to some pretty girls who are to act as bridesmaids, when Charlie Dene hands Frank Helstone an open letter, saying, a little eagerly—

"I told you so!"

"What a womanly speech!" laughs one of the pretty bridesmaids-elect.

"By Jove!" says Frank, reading the letter. "What a deuce of a nuisance!"

"Whatever is it?" resounds from all sides, but the two men glance at each other, and Charlie replaces the letter in his pocket, so it is generally understood that not to question further would be in better taste.

There is a satisfied smile on Charlie Dene's face as he finishes breakfast, but on Frank Helstone's is an impatient disgust, and he declines peremptorily two or three of his favourite dishes, and under his breath he mutters, "Hang the fellow!"

"Rose, I want you," he says, after the meal is over, and they go off to the library, where they find Charlie already seated at the writing-table, hastily scribbling away at a letter, the pleased, kindly look still on his honest face.

"Whatever is the matter?" asks Rose, mystified.

"Why, that idiot Steers—I always told you how confoundedly stubborn he was—has actually fallen in love and is going to marry some wretched girl, a professional artist, who paints wretched daubs for her very living—"

"How do you know they are wretched daubs, Frank dear?" asks Rose, and Charlie Dene laughs outright.

"Why, I thought you hoped the same as I did, were with me, in fact—that he would

fall in love with Rose Hunter when they met here."

"So I did, dear," answers Rose, ruefully. "It is awfully stupid—oh, dear," she says, beginning to realise now the extent of the calamity, "will this horrid girl keep him from being your best man?"

"Goodness knows," answers Frank, with unreasonable disgust.

"Well," says Charlie Dene, sententiously, "what can't be cured must be endured. For my part I am heartily glad that he is happy; and I am quite sure, however beautiful Miss Hunter may be, and however charming, Nol would never have fallen in love with her under the circumstances—the very stubbornness of his disposition would have precluded it to a dead certainty; and you know quite well he will not fail you. Does he not say he shall be here to-morrow, and he wants me to go back to Lintrock with him after the wedding? I shall go—"

"Oh, go, by all means," says Frank, sulkily. "Are you going to stay in all the morning writing your ecstasies to him, or are you coming for a last shot at the partridges—"

"I am coming with you in a jiff, old man. Shall I give any message for you?" asks Charlie, with his pen poised over the paper.

"Message! No; confound him! I'm not going to perjure myself."

Noland Steers duly turns up in time for dinner in the evening, looking, as Frank declares, as if totally unconscious what an ass he has made of himself. Frank shakes hands cordially enough, though, but declares it is too much to expect that he can congratulate him.

"Well, I dare say Helen and I will outlive even that, and you will quite get over your rustiness when once you see her, Frank."

"For goodness' sake, spare me any foolery of that kind; I can't fancy you rhapsodical over a woman, nothing will ever reconcile me to the idea. I consider you a fool, and so you'll think when you see Rose Hunter. I call it disgraceful to serve a girl so."

Both Noland and Charlie are in such fits of laughter at his discomfiture, and at his inconsequent reasoning, that he feels he is decidedly getting the *w<sup>ay</sup>* of it, and relieves his feelings by wondering sarcastically whether it is better to be a fool and not know it or to be one and know it.

"Well, you ought to be able to answer that question, Frank," says Charlie; and again the laugh is dead against him. Let

us hope he took it out of the birds during the morning.

That next morning, the very day before the wedding, just as they are starting for their walk to the cover-side, the bevy of fair girls spy a boy riding up the western avenue with a telegram, and Rose halts, opens it, and reads it aloud. It is from Rose Hunter, and contains these words :

"Missed my train ; will come by the next—10.20."

"Now," she cries, "if you don't call that provoking, I do." And with one consent they all declare in chorus that it really is *too bad* of Rose.

It is late, nearly half-past eleven, the same night when a footman hands Noland Steers a small twisted note in the smoking-room. He opens it with rather a surprised face, and reads as follows—

"DEAR MR. STEERS,—Miss Hunter has arrived, and will you mind coming to my morning room to be introduced to her? This is her wish.—Yours truly,

"ROSE DELMAR."

"Confound it!" he thinks, "the girl takes the initiative with a cool hand," but he shrugs his shoulders with a comical grimace, and hands the note quietly to Charlie Dene, as he leaves the room, then follows the man up the staircase and along a carpeted corridor through some double doors, under a heavy *portière*, into a room destitute of any inmate, it would seem. He glances round ; it is empty ; he walks over to the fire-place, and stands before it exactly as he might have done had there been a fire in it, so true are an Englishman's instincts in this especial direction.

"Well," he wonders, "how long am I to remain here awaiting her pleasure?" He cannot get over a feeling of awkwardness at this unlooked for position. He had rehearsed a few little possibilities of their probable meeting, and the necessary words it would behove him to say—before the matter could be laid aside, and they drop into easy relationship ; but none of them had embraced this especial form ; he had not pictured being sent for, and to be left kicking his heels like this waiting her pleasure. As his thoughts arrive at this point of manly protest, another ~~door~~ exactly in front of him opens, and good heavens ! is he dreaming ? The slight figure, clad in gleaming silk of palest blue, with wonderful excited eyes, with gleaming golden hair, walks rapidly forward, and Helen Greaves is standing before him, saying simply, though her sweet lips quiver—

"I am Rose Hunter—can you forgive me?" and she holds out the piece of

paper on which he had written the clear words—

"I forgive you everything for my love's sake."

She stands before him, a brightly gleaming figure, with a paling face, with trembling hands, from one of which the paper falls fluttering to the ground at his feet—upward she dare not look.

First an utterly dazed expression passes into Noland Steers's face ; then one as haughty as well could be ; then a comical twist insinuates itself round the corners of his handsome mouth. Yes, he cannot help it, he bursts out into uncontrollable merriment, and she throws herself into his arms laughing and sobbing all in one breath ; and Rose Delmar walks in demurely, saying—

"So kind of you to come up, Mr. Steers, for Rose was so awfully nervous I did not know what to do with her ; she is not half so daring as she pretends to be. Have you seen this, my last wedding present?" and she takes his hand and leads him across the room, and shows him what she calls, "The dear delightful old wreck that darling Rose has painted for her."

Then she leaves them, with no apology, and with no mercy returns promptly with Frank and Charlie Dene, both looking a little mystified.

"Miss Hunter!" says Frank, a trifle stiffly, "I am glad you have come in time."

"Miss Hunter—Mr. Dene," says Rose Delmar, wickedly ; and Rose Hunter cannot stand it any longer, but turns blushing away.

Noland darts after her, and taking her round the waist, says, "Charlie, my wife—the most perfect of all hypocrites—Miss Helen Greaves."

All at once the light dawns on Frank Helstone, and he glances at Rose, who is in convulsions of merriment. "Diamond cut diamond, by Jove!" he says, "and, you, Rose, I believe, are a bigger hypocrite than she is."

"No, Frank, I am nearly two inches shorter than Rose, and I weigh nearly three pounds less."

"But you knew this all along?"

"Of course I did."

"You little sinner!"

"Thank you. If it had not been for you, sir, it could not have all turned out so delightfully!"

"What on earth does she mean now?"

"Well, you left a letter of Mr. Steer's about in my room at Hyde Park Corner, that day when—when—"

"When we proposed to each other," says Frank.

"Don't be stupid. I went to return it, and found the cab had just driven off with you, and then I saw—I couldn't help it—Rose's name, and then I read it, and showed it to Rose, and she read it."

"You dishonourable creatures!"

"Granted," laughs Rose, utterly unabashed; "but you see the end always justifies the means."

"I can't think how on earth you have, either of you, slept comfortably, for the bumps on your tongues that they say always come from stories told, and you must have perjured yourselves with no end."

"No, indeed, we have not: we could stand quite a severe cross-examination. Perhaps," she smiles wickedly, "it would be good practice for you, Mr. Steers, to put us through it."

\* \* \* \*

It is a triple wedding that takes place instead of a double one, Rose Delmar having arranged everything to that effect with Rose Hunter—over what difficulties cannot money vault? The wedding-day is gloriously beautiful; the brides are lovely in their trailing gowns of creamy satin merveilleux; the bridesmaids are a perfect galaxy of beauty; but all declare that Miss Hunter bears away the palm. Perhaps it is her happiness of heart which causes her face to bloom with such sparkling radiance—Nelson, her maid, says, as she settles the rose chaplet once more on her bright hair, that for her part she is thankful all the deception is over, and which it has all turned out so well; but that she, for one, is glad enough to be back into civilised life again. Lintrock was all very well for a time, but now the heat of the summer is over, the wind was getting just a little too unbearable on the cliff.

Only the next week after the wedding news comes to Miss Sophia Demmont of the death of Alice, and asking her to come to Paris to meet Rose and escort her home, as the Earl himself was going to travel for a few months.

"The selfishness of that man transcends everything," says Miss Sophia, angrily. "How am I to get to Paris alone? and poor Rose, I suppose, is to be hustled about anyhow, very likely sent there alone to meet me—shameful, it is!"

"I will escort you, aunt, both there and back," says Charlie, readily. And in Paris they met Frank and his wife, and spent a quiet day or two with them.

Lady Rose was broken hearted, and looked ill and fatigued, but seemed to accept

naturally all Charlie's brotherly attentions.

"I say, Frank dear," says his wife—Rose Helstone now—as they watch the train glide out of the station, conveying the travellers on their way to England, "I wonder if, after a time they will love each other in a different way—and marry?"

"Don't know, dear—shouldn't be surprised. Time is a great healer."

"I am serious, Frank, and you are humbugging."

"No, I'm not, Rose; it was the way you put it speculatively as to the different kinds of loves that tickled my fancy."

"Don't be silly, Frank—poor dear Rose, she looks so wretched, and he is such a dear, kind fellow."

And the rest being so happily "woo'd and married and a," we could desire no better fate than this for the last of our Four Roses, which fate indeed came to her some time after, when Charlie's heart-wound had healed somewhat, and the memory of his love for Alice had faded into a memory only.

He had been to sea for twelve months after the wedding of the three girls; and on his return he went to visit his aunt at the Earl of Kervin's town-house.

Miss Sophia was as grim and unlovely as ever, but welcomed her nephew cordially. Yet whatever was lacking in her appearance was surely more than compensated for when Lady Rose came into the room, looking so fair, and sweet, and tenderly womanly. She seemed so unaffectedly glad to see him, and was altogether so winsome and lovable, that Charlie often wended his steps to Hyde Park Corner, and was frequently to be seen at the balls and parties attended by Lady Rose and her chaperon. And at last one night, as they stood alone in the moonlight, having strolled out from the heat and glare of the gay scene, Charlie held her little hand in his, and told her that he loved her truly and deeply—not quite as he had loved Alice, perhaps, but yet with the rich afterglow of maturity. And Rose, hiding her blushing face on his breast, whispered that she loved him too, ever since the day, she thought, when he had come home to find Alice married.

So they were happy at last, it being almost needless to say that the Earl put no obstacle to their marriage, one daughter's death being quite enough to cause all thoughts of wedding his second sweet girl "for money" to vanish from his mind.

# TEA-TABLE TALK.—BY AMY KEN.

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Modern Plays.

"The Lights o' London."

Romantic Origin of "The Danites."

Dangerous Heroines.

How Many Hours to Sleep.

Moody and Sankey.

"**I** WAS told to ask you," said Annie, at the next meeting, "whether you think the legitimate drama has improved of late years or deteriorated.

Uncle William says either the plays are better and there is nothing to find fault with, or the people are better behaved now than formerly, for you never hear the boisterous uproar which used to be general with the 'gods.'

"Most assuredly there is a better tone about everything appertaining to the stage. The fact is, people's tastes get more refined with education, and the 'Jack Sheppard' plays which used to delight the gallery occupants are no longer popular. Such plays did material injury, for they often impressed upon youths that it was a glorious thing to be a hero, even in villainy; and many a young man has been led to ruin in days gone by through witnessing the exploits of highwaymen on the stage, and many a young girl has fallen from her high estate through her mind being made familiar with depravity. Now everything is altered—the working classes do not care to see anything which depicts exaggerated views of life except in a pantomime; but they do like to see such plays as 'Our Boys' or 'Our Girls,' which exhibit life in its true character, more especially showing that the industrious, persevering, and honest can advance in the world, and with clear consciences take their position amongst their fellow men and women; but although the reckless and unscrupulous may flourish for a time, yet their sins eventually find them out.

'The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small.'

I am not a playgoer myself, but I would that every young person could witness 'The Lights o' London.' How true to life this is! two persons with the proverbial idea that London streets are paved with gold clandestinely leave home in the country for the great city, where they find everything contrary to their expectations. No one to look with sympathy on them, no one to care for them, everywhere they go there is a greed for gold, and there is no chance of the poor strangers picking up a crust of bread, so homeward, hungry and sad, they direct their weary steps. I will tell you no more about it, you must go and see the piece; but I believe modern plays to be valuable because they tell the truth, and

show country people more especially that 'Dick Whittington's' are no use nowadays, and that if any are desirous of succeeding in London, they must first find they are better than their companions in the country in the trade they follow, and then they may possibly advance in this great metropolis."

"You only refer to the male sex; now what could a lady from the country do in London if she were very accomplished?" asked Judith.

"What indeed! Every market is overstocked. She could get a very poor pittance as a governess. As a painter she would have great difficulty in making her ability known; and as an author she could do her work better in the country, and submit it to publishers. The only young women who succeed in London are those who have served a kind of apprenticeship to a profession or trade, it may be painting on china, engraving on glass, paper ornamentation, such as monographs, &c. As far as lesser art is concerned, and as far as high art, they must have been under the tuition of some eminent masters. I tell you this to show the necessity of learning something; for, as I said before, a young woman thrown on her own resources without some special knowledge will have to endure terrible straits."

"But tell us a little more of the stage. The plays are all fiction, are they not? Last year we saw 'The Danites,' which we were told was founded on fact—and oh! it was an exciting play, and the heroine was a courageous woman, found out her lover was not genuine, and discarded him," said Helena, who had just made her appearance.

"It is very curious, my dear; but a Berlin paper was given to me yesterday which I have with me, and I will endeavour to translate, if Judith, who is, I think, the best calligraphist, will take it down."

This young lady, proud of being an amanuensis, wrote as follows from Aunt Ken's dictation:—

"An American lady whose romantic adventures suggested to Joaquin Miller the scheme of his drama 'The Danites' is now staying with her daughters in one of the first hotels of the city. Her husband is one of the members of the wealthy 'Central Pacific Group' in San Francisco. It is impossible to detect in the elegant woman of the world, so full of refined grace and *chic*, the former gold-washer, who, in

the disguise of a man, laboured hard for four years in the wild mining regions of Southern California. She and the man of her choice were too poor to marry, and after he went off to try his luck at gold-finding, she boldly resolved to follow him, and the sex of the resolute maiden was never discovered by her fellow-workers and competitors. This episode of her history, which began so romantically, ended very prosaically. Her idol turned out to be anything but the noble hero which the young girl had imagined him. He was a good-for-nothing, indolent gambler, was detected cheating in a game called 'poker,' and was shot dead on the spot. The daring girl remained amongst the gold-diggers for nearly two years after his death, and was all along supposed to be a young man. When a party of marauders attacked the post-waggon at Wells Fargo, however, she bravely took a revolver in her hand, and said, 'To the rescue, comrades! We may want protection ourselves some day.' And they followed the 'daring boy,' as she was termed, who was wounded in the conflict, and conveyed to the military hospital at the next post station, Fort Keegan. Here she was compelled to reveal her sex. Amongst the passengers whose life and property she had been the chief means of saving was Major Fair, who indeed was the prize for whose possession the robbers had attacked the post. When he learned her story, he adopted her as a member of his family; and it was in the house of this 'Silver Prince' that she made the acquaintance of her present husband. Curiously enough, he was at one time a gold-digger in one of the camps at the Gypsum Creek, and remembered to have frequently met 'the young man' who is now his wife."

"What a nice sequel to the story!" said Judith.

"Yes, it is one of the few instances where what I call a 'daring heroine has been successful ; but oh ! if you knew the thousand and one instances of girls following a like career in a lesser way, and the misery it has occasioned, you would never advocate this as an example to follow."

"Thank you very much for that beautiful romance," said Helena; "and now I have a question to ask you. My husband asserts that eight hours' sleep are enough for anybody, and I insist upon ten. What do you say?"

"There is no doubt we all take too much sleep. The greatest men who have ever lived have asserted that one long sleep of six hours is quite enough for the constitution of any matured person, and that unless roused by accident, he or she should

rise at the first natural awakening. The late Duke of Wellington was of that opinion, and he always slept on a camp bedstead, where there was no room to turn round, and his own expression was, 'Let your first turn be a turn out.' There is, however, much in habit, and I confess myself that I think it a luxury to have nine hours in bed, but I am by no means sure that this is desirable. An ancient Latin authority is put into English thus—

' Six hours to sleep, to law's grave study six,  
Four spend on prayer, the rest on nature fix.'

This was his advice to a young student; but Sir William Jones, who was considered a great English authority, is made to say—

' Six hours to law, to soothing slumber seven,  
Ten to the world allot, the rest to Heaven.'

I think, however, the copyist has mistaken this great man's meaning. You see he accounts in this for twenty-three, and thus leaves an hour for prayer. I believe it should read thus—

' Seven hours to law, to soothing slumber seven,  
Ten to the world allot, and all to Heaven.'

This is intelligible, and expresses a beautiful and pious sentiment. Devotion must be limited to no special hours, but must be the business of the whole life. True and faithful in duties, the Almighty, to my mind, requires not long prayers—and, indeed, the Pharisaical doctrines are condemned in the New Testament. It is too much the evil of the day to make loud protestations which are far too often only hypocritical expressions."

"What do you think of Moody and Sankey?" asked Annie.

"I believe they are very sincere, and consider they have a mission to fulfil. Their services of prayer and song are not tedious. Mr. Moody is eloquent, and Mr. Sankey is a splendid soloist. I shall have much to say about them another day. Time will not now permit me to give my full opinion of their merits; but as their visit to London is postponed until late in the autumn, we shall have better opportunities of discussing their virtues hereafter. Undoubtedly they have done much good in their day, and particularly in America, where their untiring exertions have made many thousands of persons turn from their evil ways, and lead a truly righteous, and sober life; and in England, if we have nothing else to thank them for, every one must admit that they have been the means of introducing among us a number of tuneful melodies which have taken a strong hold upon the taste of the masses, and have contributed to spread no small amount of happiness around many a domestic hearth."

## FAMOUS MEN AND WOMEN.

### MRS. MARY COWDEN CLARKE.

NE of the most respected writers of the present century is undoubtedly Mrs. Mary Cowden Clarke. Few women have worked so laboriously and so studiously as this author; and, in conjunction with her husband, she has made Shakespeare popular in every class of society. But her name will ever be remembered in association with a "Complete Concordance to Shakespeare," one of the popular reference books of the present day, and indeed ever since it was published in 1845. Her history shows one distinct idea prominent in her mind—that education of a solid form, which would instruct the young and interest the old, would benefit a nation more than all the glittering displays which the world calls pleasure, and that if young and old were taught to reason together on the great works of thought which have been produced, and are now published in a cheap form, there would be less desire for idle gossip and scandal.

Mary Novello was the eldest daughter of Mr. Vincent Novello, the musician, and sister of Mr. Alfred Novello, the well-known musical publisher, and of Clara Novello, who became the wife of Count Gigliucci, afterwards a member of the Italian Parliament. Mary was born in June, 1809, and was always considered a reticent child; and as she grew in years she devoted much of her time to study. Shakespeare was, however, her constant companion, and she was never tired of reading and commenting upon his works; and in this she was rather encouraged by her mother, who was a woman of considerable learning. One of her first works she dedicates to "Mrs. Vincent Novello. The mother whose justly potent influence has never been exerted but for the truest advantage of her happy children."

It is often said that "marriages are made in heaven," and it is quite certain Mrs. Cowden Clarke thought that she obtained a heaven-born husband, for their ideas commingled from the time they first met. Her brother, Mr. Alfred Novello, had commenced business as a music publisher, and, wanting further assistance, had sought the services of Mr. Cowden Clarke. The latter was in usual courtesy, introduced to the sister, who was then nineteen, and he was forty-two; but there seemed no disparity in their years, at least in the young lady's eyes. He was active and gentlemanly; and, more than all, he "liked Shakespeare," which, as lovers, they studied, and after marriage they studied him closer. Day after day for years Mary Cowden Clarke put into manuscript that "Complete Concordance to Shakespeare," which as a verbal index

to all the passages in the dramatic work of the great poet will ever be esteemed where the English language is spoken. The work she consecrates to Shakespeare's memory, and says it is for the use of the British nation whose brightest ornament is his genius. But the mind of the author can best be understood and her labours valued by a quotation from her preface. She says:

"Shakespeare, the most frequently quoted, because the most universal-minded genius that ever lived of all authors, best deserves a concordance to his works. To what subject may we not with felicity apply a motto from this greatest of poets—the divine, commanding the efficacy and *two-fold force of prayer—to be fore stalled ere we come to fall, or pardoned being down;* the astronomer, supporting his theory by allusions to *the moist star upon whose influence Neptune's Empire stands;* the naturalist, striving to elucidate a fact representing the habits of the singing masons or heavy gaited toads; the botanist, lecturing on the various properties of *the small flower within whose infant rind poison hath residence and medicine power,* or on the growth of *summer grass, fastest by night unseen, yet crescive in his faculty;* the philosopher, speculating upon *the respect that makes calamity of no long life—the dread of something after death, the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns;* the lover, telling his whispering tale in a fair lady's ear, and rowing the winnowed purity and persistent constancy of his heart's dear love; the lawyer, discussing some nice sharp quibble of the law; the musician, descanting upon the touches of sweet harmony; the painter, describing his art, that pretty mocking of the life; the novel-writer, seeking an illustrative heading to a fresh chapter—the baby figure of the giant mass to come at large; the orator, labouring an emphatic point in appeal to the passions of assembled multitudes—to stir men's blood; the soldier, endeavouring to vindicate his profession by vaunting the pomp and circumstance of glorious war; or the humanist, advocating the quality of mercy, urging that *to revenge is no valour but to bear,* and maintaining that *the earth is wronged by man's oppression—all may equally adorn their page or emblazon their speech with gems from Shakespeare's works."*

The author then goes on to say that she trusts this will be a faithful guide to the rich mine of intellectual treasure, and she hopes that the sixteen years' assiduous labour devoted to the work during the twelve years' writing and the four more bestowed on collating with recent editions,

## Biographies of Famous Men and Women.

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MRS. MARY COWDEN CLARKE.

may accomplish that great object she had in view—a complete Concordance to Shakespeare. "Most poor matters point to rich ends," she says in another place, quoting her favourite bard, and continues: "I trust my humble labour may tend to the rich end of furthering a universal study, and appreciation of his genius;" and, indeed, if labour could do it Mrs. Cowden Clarke was bound to be successful, for there are no less than 150,000 quotations, all put under the heading of the first noun in the line: though the line may be quoted twice, or even thrice. Thus if the word *conceit* was looked for amongst a multitude this will be found thus:

Conceit more rich in matter than in words.  
*Romeo and Juliet.*

If the word *rich* were sought it will be found thus:

More rich in matter than in words.

This work commenced the year after her marriage, and was published in 1845; but when this labour of love was completed Mrs. Clarke did not allow her pen to be idle. In 1848 a work written by her was published, called "The Adventures of Kit Liam, Mariner," an amusing work, and at the same time edifying; in 1854 appeared, "The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines," a very clever work; in 1854 "The Two Cousins; or, Mutual Influence," which she dedicates to her mother—a book full of advice for the young, interspersed with much interesting incidents, that even persons who love light reading become absorbed in it. Then, in 1856, she produced something written in a merry mood, called "The Song of a Drop of Wather, by Harry Wandsworth Shortfellow" which is, of course, a parody on "Hiawatha;" but this also teaches a good moral. "World Noted Women" appeared in 1856, in which Mrs. Cowden Clarke gives descriptions of celebrated women from the time of Cleopatra to Florence Nightingale. And thus she continued producing a book about every two years, besides contributing to magazines, or more substantial works, for which her assistance was frequently sought. In conjunction with her husband she produced "Many Happy Returns of the Day," a Birthday Book, and several annotated editions of Shakespeare's Plays, which are considered valuable, one of those alone contain 17,000 notes, emendations, and annotations.

About 1867 Mr. Cowden Clarke and his wife went to reside in the South of Europe—first at Nice, then at Genoa; and at the latter place the former died, in March, 1877, at the venerable age of ninety; and in 1878 Mrs. Cowden Clarke published "Recollections of Writers," in which she

says: "These were written by the author couple happily together. One of the wedded pair has quitted this earthly life; and the survivor now puts the 'Recollections' into complete and collected form, happy at least in this, that she feels she is thereby fulfilling a wish of her lost other self;" and she concludes thus: "Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke may in truth be held in tender remembrance by their readers as among the happiest of married lovers, who for more than forty years, writing together, reading together, working together, enjoying together the perfection of loving literary association; and kindly sympathy may be felt for her who is left singly to inscribe herself,

"MARY COWDEN CLARKE."

In these "Recollections of Writers," Mrs. Cowden Clarke takes especial care to inform the reader that the older recollections are those of her late husband, who first published them in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, but after they appeared in this periodical he had further remembrances of the noble and great writers with whom he had been associated in his early days; as, for instance, he was the intimate friend of John Keats, the poet, who died in 1821, when only in his twenty-fifth year, and his death was said to have been accelerated by the severe criticism of his first poem, "Endymion," in the *Quarterly Review*. Byron was determined to perpetuate the error, though informed before his book was published that poor Keats died of pulmonary consumption, which would have happened even though he had always basked in the sunshine of prosperity.

Byron's lines appear in the 11th canto of "Don Juan":—

"John Keats, who was killed by one critique,  
Just as he really promised something great,  
If not unintelligible—without Greek—  
Contrived to talk about the gods of late  
Much as they might have been supposed to  
speak."

Poor fellow! his was an untoward fate.  
Tis strange the mind, that very fiery particle,  
Should let itself be snuff'd out by an Article."

There are others besides Mr. Cowden Clarke who believe that Byron having once penned this stroke of wit was not willing to give it up. Mr. Clarke, however, is desirous the world should know that her husband's father kept a school at Enfield, and that the poet Keats attended it. He was seven years younger than Mr. Clarke, and when boys together the young poet looked up to her husband for sympathy when his early inspirations were laughed at by others. This happy intimacy continued after Keats left school to become an apprentice to a surgeon in Edmonton.

# RECOILED ON HERSELF.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE BRIDE OF HEAVEN," ETC.

## CHAPTER I.



"**T**RAITOR, I hate you!" These words were uttered with passionate vehemence by a woman of majestic stature, and a handsome, foreign cast of countenance, as she stood before an open cabinet, holding in her hand the portrait of a man, on the lineaments of whom she gazed with flashing eyes.

Her face was pale, and her dark eyes glittered like stars from beneath the long-fringed eyelids, seeming to scintillate with fiery passion in their hollow depths; for this beautiful face was wan and wasted by a long illness, and the perfect features were sharpened which, when in health, had shown an exquisite contour. Passion gave to the fevered orbs a brilliancy more dazzling, a gleam which shone like insanity's spark in the dilating pupils.

The hand that grasped with

trembling hold the case in which the portrait lay was a beautiful one, and the long taper fingers worked nervously in the agitation of those freshly recalled memories of past happiness; and as she gazed upon the handsome countenance which had won her heart, and made the ruin of its sweetest hopes, that heart was pierced to its centre with passionate pain; and rage, dark and dread, filled her bosom as she remembered the humiliation of her position.

By this man—the likeness of whom she had treasured so tenderly, had kissed with such fervour, believing the original to be all her own—she had been scorned and deserted for another; and jealous fury, together with wounded pride, had mastered the calm dignity of her bearing, and with those opening words, "Traitor, I hate you!" issuing from her scornful lips, she cast the portrait from her, and placing the heel of her shoe upon it, she crushed to atoms those faultlessly photographed features on which her eyes had often with such fondness rested when her lover was absent from her presence.

"Yes, I hate you!" she again ejaculated; "and thus, as I trample out the reflection of the treacherous face which fascinated me, do I crush out the blighted germ of the love you inspired in my bosom," added she, looking down contemptuously on the mutilated remains of the perfect simulacrum of him she anathematised as a traitor. It was with an almost satisfied smile that she gazed upon her work of destruction—a smile very unpleasant to see, for it told more plainly than words could speak that hers was a nature such as could cherish an invincible hatred, and could even plot and work out some dire tragedy of revenge.

The passionate yearning which first shone in this woman's eyes as she opened the case containing her lost lover's likeness soon gave place to that hard, stern look, as on remembrance the fatal cause of her illness flashed back, and she stood gathering together the links of the degrading reality that had brought her nigh unto death. The thought of her too demonstrative preference for this man was the bitterest pang of her humiliation, for its memory lowered her in her own estimation, and brought a quicker revulsion of feeling, with which all the softer emotions in a moment became frozen ; and thus, with that cold, hard, contemptuous smile on her face, she stooped and gathered up the scattered fragments of the highly finished production of a first-rate artist, and walking to the window, she dispersed them amongst the branches of the shrubbery below. Not a tear did she shed over the ruin she had wrought, not a tear fell for the wreck of her once fondest hopes, for the warm current of her woman's heart was for ever frozen, and not the tenderest affection could ever again thaw the ice which had closed around the region where such hot, fiery, flaming passion had but lately burned. She was one of those whose natures have no medium—it is either storm or calm ; and feeling was dead, all save one—the unquenchable, insatiable passion of hatred, burning in a fierce fire within her, thirsting for revenge.

All sense of wrong had been for a time obliterated, as illness had laid prostrate this proud beauty, and quenched Reason's lights of steady remembrance and the world's bright aspirations. It was but as a flickering gleam in a burning-out lamp that Reason leapt up at intervals and showed her dim visions of the reality ; and then all was dark again amid the clouds of delirium. Her lover's desertion had been a terrible shock to her, and to wounded pride she had succumbed, and was nigh passing through the gates of the grave ; but with returning life and strength her dominant characteristic, *pride*, resumed its sway, and she resolved to conquer her weakness, and allow no one to think that she mourned for a love she had not the power to hold. Thus when renewed vigour was hers, her first act had been to destroy the one relic which could keep memory lingering on tender chords ; for the thrilling of her pulses as her eyes again rested on that fascinating face told her that her surest way to forgetfulness of the original would be to destroy the portrait. Not until she had lost her lover did she know how madly she had idolised him, and that

when that love met its death, hatred would rise out of its grave and be her heart's companion through the rest of her life. Thus pride bore down all tender emotions in that gush of anguish out of which she had risen, supported by a legion of devils, to take her triumphantly over all the weaker feelings of woman's heart ; and thus Hatred's soliloquy was heard.

Theresa Dumbarton was the daughter of an English gentleman who had married an Italian lady of noble birth and fortune, from whom she inherited the vengeful nature which is the characteristic of Italian nationality. When her father died, Mrs. Dumbarton had been invited by her husband's family to come and reside amongst them ; but the climate of England did not suit her, as she was delicate ; it was far too chilly for a daughter of the sunny skies of Italy, and she took a violent cold which ended in a galloping consumption, leaving her two daughters to the guardianship of her husband's brother, Colonel Dumbarton.

There was but a year's difference in the ages of these two children, and each possessed a good fortune inherited from both parents. They were remarkably handsome girls ; Theresa being also extremely accomplished, she was consequently an object of general admiration, as so many advantages combined in one person are not often to be met with. There were many devoted slaves following in Theresa's train—many who would fain have made this beautiful girl the partner of their lives ; but Theresa's heart responded not to the love offered her ; and but one only seemed to have made any decided advancement towards a favourable reception of his attentions.

Colonel Delacourt had certainly distanced the rest of Theresa's admirers, and would in all probability have won the prize, which every one supposed would have been his by perseverance, had there not come between him and his worshipped idol one whose fascinating manners and greater personal advantages eclipsed all others, and who very speedily drove the Colonel along with the other aspirants out of the field. Theresa was at once made captive to the fascinations to which so many others had succumbed, for Captain Fitzmaurice was one of those male flirts who possess the mysterious power of thoroughly infatuating the weaker sex, and of drawing by some unaccountable spell their hearts from the allegiance they have vowed to others, even to sundering the links that bind the sacred chains of Hymen.

Not that Captain Fitzmaurice had ever used his power so detrimentally to himself

and his female admirers, as his principles of honour made him shun the temptation to which his vanity might otherwise have yielded. He aspired to no such notoriety ; but he looked upon it as no breach of honour or trust to trifle with the hearts that all too readily surrendered themselves to his charms ; and Theresa Dumbarton was one of those who showed too openly that he, and only he, had the power of touching the chord which would give out a tender echo.

Captain Fitzmaurice had just arrived in England on leave from India, and having been for some time at the same station with Colonel Dumbarton's son, with whom he had been on terms of great intimacy, he had brought letters of introduction, and also some presents from Ernest Dumbarton to his family ; thus he at once found himself drawn into their midst on terms of very close friendship. He, of course, could not but admire the handsome girl with whom he was so constantly associated, and who did her utmost to charm him ; but he never entertained an idea of falling into any net of Love's weaving, only just amusing himself, as he had hitherto done.

But in Theresa Dumbarton he had found his match in the game in which he had been so often the winner ; for she was so much in love with him that she would not leave the initiative to him, but made such subtle advances, and drew him so cunningly off his guard, that before he knew the import of the words he was uttering, he had allowed such to pass his lips as were tantamount to a declaration of love, at which this girl, so versant in the ways of the world, grasped at once, and from which he could not retract without the imputation of dishonour.

He had never really cared for any one ; and, Theresa Dumbarton was a girl that any man might be proud to see leading in fashionable circles as his wife ; and as he had "put his foot in it," as he had acknowledged to a friend, he thought he had better hold his ground as the winner of a good fortune in addition to a very superior woman. He confessed that love on his side formed no part of the compact ; but as he had not had sense enough to escape entanglement, he did not see what else he could do but marry this splendid creature.

~~Theresa Dumbarton~~ had achieved a great triumph in gaining Captain Fitzmaurice, but she knew what others did not — that she had studied his weak points, and assailed him thereon to bring him to surrender himself as her captive. She had been piqued at his not becoming en-

slaved, as the rest had been, and she therefore took greater trouble to please him ; and then, as her own heart felt his power, she had had recourse to stratagem to catch him in the web of an engagement. But when she had caught him in her meshes she was not altogether satisfied, for she felt conscious that the love her soul craved for was not hers ; and she was not sure that he gave her even the full meed of respect in consequence of the advances she had made towards him. She could impute no mercenary motives to him, as he had not sought, as others had, to win her ; she had, as the common phrase goes, "thrown herself at his head," and when she thought of it she felt somewhat lowered in her own estimation, as she had, without doubt, laid herself and her fortune at his feet.

The memory of this galled her proud spirit ; for was it in human nature to resist the temptation of all she offered him when he had scarcely anything of his own ? He had yet to win his way in the world, where Fortune's favours are very unequally dispensed ; and in his position how few there are who would have acted differently ! He had held back ; he did not readily grasp the independence so invitingly in his reach, because he knew he had not even love to give the girl in return ; and besides this he loved his profession, and was ambitious of rising in it, and feared that the sacrifice of his military career might be expected by the heiress to be made for her sake.

It was through the officiousness of a lady-friend that he was at last drawn into the net he had only been playing around ; for she, with a thoroughly good intention, but injudicious interference, became the layer of the foundation of a future of misery for the girl whose interests she believed she was serving ; but her meddling only brought about most tragic results in after years. Being a mutual friend, it was her desire to make the happiness of both ; and well knowing how much in love Theresa was with Captain Fitzmaurice, she fancied he could not make a better matrimonial speculation, as he appeared to admire her very much. Captain Fitzmaurice had not, however, given her the same confidence regarding the state of his feelings as Theresa had done, and she only drew her conclusions from his very marked attentions, which, however, were not quite voluntary on his part. The girl forced them from him most dexterously, determinedly drawing him to her side by every means in her power ; and this was done so adroitly that to every one else he appeared the advancing party. But without being positively rude he could not have avoided accepting the

signs made by her to draw him near her, and to perform some small service for her ; though he most unwillingly surrendered himself to the wiles of the syren. Thus Mrs. Williams took upon herself one day to lecture him. She told him "his attentions to Miss Dumbarton had been such as to make her the subject of gossip in connection with himself, and in consequence of his devotedness he was in duty bound to marry her ; if not, he would be considered to have acted very dishonourably."

"But," objected he, "I have given her no reason to infer that I meant marriage ; and you know that my attentions conveyed no such meaning."

"No reason? When you have been her devoted slave ; have so attached yourself to her as to drive away one who had every chance of winning her until you set yourself in rivalry with him!"

"I had no such intention ; if Miss Dumbarton chose to throw away the substance and grasp at a shadow, that is not my fault," replied he.

"She would not have done so if you had not led her to expect an offer of marriage, as every one else did. Colonel Delacourt, who really loved Theresa, has been terribly cut-up by her decided rejection of his addresses, for she gave him every encouragement until you devoted yourself to her. It is not fair, it is not honourable to rob a man of the love he had almost gained, and then to affirm *you* never sought to win it. Your conduct is heartless in the extreme, Captain Fitzmaurice," said Mrs. Williams.

"Well, I don't know what there has been in my attentions to Miss Dumbarton to be looked at in such a wonderfully strong light."

"Oh, of course, that is what too many of you triflers say."

"You are unjust, Mrs. Williams. I have not trifled with Miss Dumbarton."

"I don't know what you call trifling ; all I know is that if you had amused yourself in such a manner with a daughter of mine I should have called you to account long ago ; but fortunately I have no daughters to have their hearts broken by treacherous men."

"Well, if such a view is to be taken of my friendly intercourse, I must save my character, I suppose : I must submit to the inevitable, and allow the girl to marry me if she chooses."

"Captain Fitzmaurice!"

"Well, Mrs. Williams, it amounts to that, for I never had any intention of marrying her, I assure you ; but as you have persuaded me against my reason that

I have acted dishonourably, I must make the best of it, and take her for better or for worse."

"And you will get far more than you deserve, in my opinion. A girl like Theresa Dumbarton is not to be picked up every day ; and you may think yourself a very lucky man if you get her."

"If! Is there any doubt about it, think you? Because if there is I won't risk being refused ; women are deceivers as well as men—are they not?"

"You know but too well that you stand on sure ground ; and you ought to be ashamed of yourself for indulging in jests like this at the expense of a lady who has honoured you with her preference, when she might have done so much better."

"I regret much that her preference for me should have marred her prospects ; but perhaps it may not be too late to remedy the mistake."

"It is too late, for Colonel Delacourt has gone abroad in despair, and under the belief of your being his rival ; and his family are quite disappointed about Theresa's having thrown him over for your sake."

"I suppose I ought to consider myself immensely honoured," responded he, with a shrug of his shoulders ; "but I never meant to stand in rivalry with Colonel Delacourt, and have no wish to become the victim of Hymen yet awhile," he added.

"If such are your sentiments you should certainly have made your attentions more general," responded his tormentor.

"You are a very strong advocate of Miss Dumbarton's indeed ; and if there were many such strategists as you, Mrs. Williams, messes would be broken up, there would be no bachelors left to attend them," replied he, satirically, for he felt that Mrs. Williams was trying to convict him of having striven to win Theresa Dumbarton from another man.

The dialogue had gone thus far when the lady in question was announced ; she had called by appointment to take Mrs. Williams for a drive, which at once made her exit to prepare herself for the same. But Mrs. Williams spent an unconscionably long while over adoring her person, during which time William Fitzmaurice's doom was sealed. Theresa had been very sentimental, and had ~~set~~ <sup>been</sup> up a little scene to work upon Captain Fitzmaurice's feelings. She breathed words of unmistakable meaning : they implied that he had trifled with her affections ; that he was heartless ; and a flood of tears brought on the climax which he had striven hard to avert. Some

men cannot bear to look upon a woman's tears, and William Fitzmaurice was one of these ; and as the pearly drops flowed for him, and were caused by his hard-heartedness and his indifference towards her, flattered vanity, together with the self-condemnation which impressed him, overcame caution, and words of tenderness were uttered as his arm encircled the fair form—words which committed him irrevocably ere he was fully aware of the serious import these expressions conveyed.

Thus was he caught fast in the net that had been laid for him, the meshes of which had been knotted by two very keen-witted women, from which there was no escape for him, at least honourably. For honour's sake he suffered the entanglement, not wishing the world's censure to rest upon his name ; and with a spirit chasing under the rash vows by which he had bound himself in a moment of excitement, he left the fair syren to the enjoyment of her drive with her accomplice, whose congratulations were profuse to the bride-elect on the triumph she had achieved ; and William Fitzmaurice returned to his hotel with a grave face, to reflect on the folly into which he had been hurried by momentary sentimentality.

A union with Theresa Dumbarton was in every respect advantageous to him, save in the one grand chord of harmony—*love* ; and he felt far from satisfied with the contemplation of his future without that true sentiment which alone could make his wife all in all to him. He admired Theresa Dumbarton, and he liked her better than any of the girls with whom he had been associated ; but he felt that his regard for her savoured far more of the Platonic nature than of Cupid's thrilling tenderness ; and soon, ah, too soon ! he found out that he had made a fatal mistake in allowing a too-keen sense of honour to bind him in Engagement's stronghold when Inclination was struggling so hard for freedom. But he saw not the way by which to sunder the bonds with which he had tied himself, how to free himself from the promise his heart urged him to break.

Captain Fitzmaurice had not been engaged longer than three months when there came to him the knowledge that those ties that bind him *must* be broken, rent apart, even though honour should be sacrificed in the sundering of them ; for it had been his destiny to meet the *one woman*, the only one, who had the power to awaken his heart to those true emotions which can alone render life happy. He had been getting used to the unsatisfactory prospect of matrimony with a one-sided

love only, for every one assured him that he was one of the most fortunate of men ; and although he could not exactly coincide with them in this opinion, he thought that he might have done worse, for the girl was passionately fond of him, and trusted him so perfectly that she would not allow her fortune to be settled upon herself. Into his keeping she was willing to give her all, and expressed violent indignation at the suggestion of a settlement being made to prevent his having any power over what was hers.

It was Theresa's entire trust in his honour which made Captain Fitzmaurice's heart more reconciled to what he had done ; and he had begun to hope that after marriage his feelings might become of a warmer nature towards her ; but he seemed in no hurry to knit the cords of feeling closer by the assumption of his rights as a husband, although several hints had been given him by General Dumbarton of there being no cause for delaying the consummation of their happiness in wedlock's bonds. A something, he knew not what, held him back from grasping that which many others would have required no second hint to take ; a presentiment, a merciful warning breathed ever in the silent hours to delay the irrevocable step ; and thus through a superstition engendering procrastination was he saved from a life of misery ; for the hour was at hand when by Fate's directing will he was to be brought face to face with his ideal, and to learn that there was a spot in his heart consecrated to that one alone.

## CHAPTER II.

**G**ABRIELLE STRATHWAY was the very opposite of Theresa Dumbarton in every respect.

Theresa was of majestic stature, with black hair, brilliant black orbs, and a clear olive complexion ; while Gabrielle had the form of a sylph, a fair, clear complexion, bright chestnut hair, and dark hazel eyes. Her form was beautifully moulded, and in her soft eyes there shone a tender, loving light. She was modestly retiring in manner, but full of genuine mirth and pleasant repartee ; and there was a sweetness in the expression of her face and an unconsciousness of her own beauty which made her the more attractive, and caused admiring eyes to turn again and again to the refreshing simplicity of her attire, and the fresh beauty of this charming child of nature.

It was at the theatre that Captain Fitzmaurice first beheld Gabrielle Strathway ; and she shone before his vision in pure

robes of white, like a bright seraph amid the gay, fashion-bedizened crowd. He was sitting beside his affianced one when Gabrielle entered a box opposite that in which he and Theresa Dumbarton sat. He gave a start of surprise, for he had never yet beheld a form of such bewitching loveliness; and in spell-bound steadfastness his gaze was fastened upon her face as she looked around her with pleasure beaming in her soft, bright eyes. At the first sight of this fair girl his heart had given a great bound in his bosom, and he knew at once that she was the soul of his soul, that from henceforward the one to whom he had engaged himself could be nothing to him.

There he sat in rapt admiration of this lovely girl, never noticing the two young ladies sitting at his side, while Gabrielle's chaperon opposite had been regarding him with fixed attention, and an amused smile on her countenance. She had recognised Captain Fitzmaurice, and wished to acknowledge his presence there; but he was so completely lost in admiration of her young charge that he was quite oblivious of Lady Featherstone's proximity to her.

Theresa had spoken twice to Captain Fitzmaurice and he had not heard her, for his senses had all seemed "centred in sight;" and his abstraction caused Theresa's eyes to turn upon those opposite. She had been talking to Miss Maxwell when the party entered, and so had not observed them until her attention was drawn by the direction of Captain Fitzmaurice's gaze to those on the other side; and then, for the first time since her engagement, she felt the consciousness that what she had striven so hard to gain might not be held so firmly as she had fancied she had the power of keeping it. A jealous pang pierced her heart as she watched the fascinated gaze which was riveted on the sweet, blushingly beaming face opposite, and Captain Fitzmaurice's perfect forgetfulness of herself, for her voice had not had power to break the spell under which he seemed bound.

She laid her hand upon his arm, and it was not until then that he awakened to a sense of her presence. With a start he turned to meet a face which then for him had no interest—a face, too, the beauty of which was marred by the scowl that hung upon the broad brows, and the angry light shining in the dark eyes.

"What are you gazing at? you seem to have lost your senses," said Theresa, in a haughty tone.

If her face, in its transformation, had lost its charm, the tone she had assumed was calculated to dispel it altogether, for

William Fitzmaurice was not one to submit to the domineering of a woman, and he therefore answered her with equal haughtiness, "Truly, I believe I have lost them," and then turned again to gaze on the fair face which had fascinated him.

Theresa was maddened by his indifference to her, but she was determined others should not see that she was being slighted, so she again laid her hand upon his arm, and endeavouring to compose her countenance into more serenity, she asked, "Do you know those people?"

"What people? Where?" answered he, in bewilderment.

"Those you are staring at, I mean," she replied.

"I fancy he only sees one," said Miss Maxwell, with a wicked smile, for she did not like Theresa, saw she was jealous, and was resolved to mortify her. "You perhaps have met Miss Strathway before?" she added questioningly to Captain Fitzmaurice. "Is she not lovely?"

"No, I have never seen her before," answered he, dreamily.

"Then all I can say is that you have been guilty of great rudeness in staring at her so; and you have been attracting attention towards you through so doing," said Theresa.

Captain Fitzmaurice winced; he felt that he had committed a breach of politeness in thus giving his sole attention to this lovely girl, and forgetting those who had a claim on him; but Theresa's tone was not calculated to conciliate him, and he therefore kept his face turned from his imperious *fiancée*, whom he was beginning to look upon as an incubus, which he knew not how to shake off.

"But, Captain Fitzmaurice, look at that old lady in violet velvet and magnificent pearls! She is some one of distinction, surely; and she certainly appears to know you. Look at her, do, for she has been smiling and nodding evidently to you," said Miss Maxwell, again addressing Captain Fitzmaurice.

"It really is Lady Featherstone!" exclaimed he, as he did "Miss Maxwell's bidding; then, bowing to the lady who had been trying so vainly to attract his attention, he said, "She and I are very old acquaintances; I must go round and speak to her."

Old acquaintances! Well, I should think she must feel very much flattered by your obliviousness of *her* presence while gazing so intently at one so near her," said Theresa, again. Her tone was bitterly sarcastic, and her face, Captain Fitzmaurice saw, was blanched to the hue of

death as he turned to answer her. He knew that the demon of jealousy was tearing her heart, and he determined at once on teaching her a lesson. The hope, too, came to his own heart that her pride might assert itself, and cause her to break off her engagement with him, and thereby save him the unpleasant part of annulling it himself; for he felt that with Theresa as his wife he could never look for happiness, and if the ties that bound them were not sundered by herself he must sever them at any cost, for he could not cast his lot in life with a woman who expected him to surrender himself entirely to her arrogant will; he would not wear such slavish chains for any woman.

"So, my lady, you nurse the green-eyed monster in your bosom, do you?" said he to himself. "If on so slight a provocation you can put on such airs and such looks now, what might I not expect after the fastening of the matrimonial knot? I should stand a small chance of domestic peace with such a mate, I fancy. Bother that old match-maker's meddling! I wonder if she got a handsome *doucœur* for making me overstep the bounds of discretion. Ah, if it had not been for her hypocritical preaching about honour, I should not have been in this fix. I lost my head and set my foot in a trap. How am I to extricate myself, I wonder?"

Thus rapidly had sped on the mental train to a sure collision with his fiancée's ideas of propriety as he marked the imperious tone and angry, flashing eyes that met his; and with a look of defiance which said plainly "I am a match for you," he rose and left the box, and soon after entered that on the opposite side, greeting with great cordiality the chaperon of the fair young creature who had been the innocent cause of the first disagreement between the affianced pair. An introduction at once took place, and Captain Fitzmaurice seated himself with the utmost nonchalance beside the object of contention, with whom he became entirely engrossed; and utterly ignoring the one who had a right to his attentions, on he sat, regardless of the fierce glances from the other side, every moment becoming more deeply captivated by the fresh beauty, the charming simplicity of dress, and the freedom from coquetry of this fair girl. It was so pleasant to listen to her low, sweet voice, her sensible remarks, and her little outbreaks of merriment at anything droll, and her soft laughter was like music's melody to his listening ears. There he sat in lively conversation, all heedless of the flight of time, never casting a look towards

the livid face of Theresa, whose bosom heaved with rage, jealousy, and mortification at the manner in which he ignored her presence.

The first piece was over, and then Captain Fitzmaurice bethought him of the duty incumbent on him—the duty which had in a few short hours become thoroughly irksome to him, for Love's wings were close enfolding him, the witching spell holding him captive to another. He was about to rise and yield up pleasant unrestraint for stiff dignity, when on looking across he found that the box was empty, for his party had vanished.

It was indeed a relief to Captain Fitzmaurice to feel himself at liberty to continue in such agreeable company, and to be happy without the consciousness of being watched by jealous eyes. Under such surveillance he could not sit at ease and listen to those sweet tones, and look through those bright, softly beaming eyes into the soul of innocence that he could read only too well, for the trembling in the voice of this unsophisticated young creature, the warm blushes dyeing her cheeks, and the drooping of those dark-fringed lids, as his unmistakably admiring orbs locked down into hers, told him the gratifying truth, that under his power the gentle heart was melting and learning to know the first emotions of a passion of which she had only heard or read, and in awaking these first throbs of love within her bosom he felt a keen sense of pleasure—a triumph, a happiness he had never yet experienced.

But was it right of him, an engaged man, to feel as he then felt, and to look into those sweet eyes as he was doing—to hang on every tone of her melodious accents; to press with his own the small white fingers as he took the play-bill from them; to let his passion-breathing sighs sweep over her modest cheek as he read with her the characters? He never thought of this—of the cruel wrong he was doing to two women—the one whose heart was already his, writhing in burning torture at his neglect, and this gentle one, who knew not of the claim on his devotion this other possessed. He only thought of himself; of the selfish gratification of the moment in teaching this young creature her first lesson of love, to be a hard one for her, perhaps, to forget. But he loved her, he felt it all too surely, and he did not love Theresa Dumbarton; and yet to her he had pledged himself, was almost on the eve of marriage! How was it all to end? How were his chains to be severed—how be free to woo the being unto whom his

soul was then yearning with servid fire? and if severed would this pure-minded girl accept from him the vows which had been heartlessly broken to another? There, as he sat, with his heart beating wildly towards fair Gabrielle Strathway, did he think these thoughts; and he knew that the soul of honour was no longer his. To honour's dictates he had sacrificed himself, and now to love he must sacrifice honour, or else live a life of misery amid his heart's unrest; and his mind was a chaos of perplexity as he left the theatre, his heart a furnace of burning love never before felt by him.

Gabrielle was borne upon his arm to the carriage, for Lady Featherstone had an escort of more mature years than Captain Fitzmaurice; and she, in utter ignorance of the state of affairs, was all unconsciously giving her countenance to a very dishonourable proceeding, for she had insisted on the presence of Captain Fitzmaurice at supper; and on his departure from her house she made him promise to dine there on the following day—an invitation he all too willingly accepted. Had Lady Featherstone known of his being an engaged man, she would have at once discouraged the admiration he demonstrated towards her niece, and have shielded her from the dangerous association with so fascinating a man as Captain Fitzmaurice. His having left the party in the opposite box, and being seemingly uninterested in them, caused her to think them but mere acquaintances; and as he lingered in such evident pleasure in the proximity of Gabrielle, she was led to believe him to be unshackled by any such ties as bound him to the haughty beauty he had deserted, and so she felt pleased with the admiration he evinced.

Gabrielle Strathway had just finished her education, and was on a visit to her aunt prior to her departure to join her parents in India: Sir Humphrey and Lady Featherstone had met Captain Fitzmaurice in Bombay, where they had left him when they took their departure for England. Sir Humphrey was then only General Featherstone; but he had distinguished himself during the Mutiny in 1857, and on his return home had had a knighthood conferred on him. He had suffered much from wounds received at Cawnpore, in consequence of which he retired from the Service. Captain Fitzmaurice had called at their house on his arrival in London, but was informed that they were on the Continent, and he would, in all probability, not have become entangled as he had with Theresa Dumbarton had these friends been

at home to give him the usual welcome in their midst.

That welcome had been vouchsafed to him by General Dumbarton through his son's introduction, who cordially received him, expressing his desire that Captain Fitzmaurice would make his house his home; but General Dumbarton had been no party to the inveiglement of the young man into this engagement; he had never counted on any such result from the frequent intercourse between his niece and Captain Fitzmaurice, nor did he wish the union, and had granted his sanction to the marriage because Theresa had given such decided preference to him. He had considered Colonel Delacourt the most suitable match for Theresa, and was much disappointed at her rejection of his suit; but he would not coerce her inclination or raise any objections to the partner she had chosen, as he deemed it the wisest plan to allow her to be a free agent and to make her own happiness, there being no possible objection to the man to whom she had given her affections excepting want of wealth; but as Theresa possessed this requisite, it could be dispensed with on the other side.

There had been some negotiations in contemplation regarding Captain Fitzmaurice's selling out of the army, as it was the wish of Miss Dumbarton that he should do so, and obtain some appointment at home. He had not quite arranged matters, being loth to take this step, for he was fond of his profession, and desirous of rising in it; and now he found fresh incentive to advancement, a deeper motive urging, inspiring him to energy in a military career.

The power of love was stronger than that of interest, and he had resolved to sacrifice the latter to the former, and to rely upon the favouring of Fate to secure the desire of his heart—the happiness for which his soul yearned—a union with this gentle being to whom his heart had leaped at once, before whom it had bowed in adoration, acknowledging her true worth. She, only she, should be his wife if she would but accept his love; he could never bind the links more closely in which Theresa Dumbarton had caught him; they must be severed, for he could never marry her, never love her, now that he had seen sweet Gabrielle Strathway. If the girl had not pride enough to give him his *congé* after his treatment of her that night, he must tell her plainly that he did not love her, and could not fulfil his engagement.

## CHAPTER III.

HE next day Captain Fitzmaurice called at Prince's Square. He was anxious to get over the unpleasant interview with Theresa, for it could not be otherwise than unpleasant. He found her, as he had expected, in anything but a placable mood, and they soon began to spur at each other. Both waxed warm, and, amid recriminations, both forgot themselves, using hard terms one to the other ; and he ended by telling her that had he ever loved her he would not have risked his happiness with one whose temper was so ungovernable ; that the consummation of wedlock would bring only misery to both, as he was not one to submit to a woman's domineering. He added that he had been trapped by a matchmaker into a proposal when quite uncertain as to what his feelings really were, and which he too late found were not those of love.

"Then am I to understand that you have never cared for me ?" asked she.

"Such is the truth, I must confess," he responded.

"Then it was for my fortune alone that you wished to wed me ?"

"Miss Dumbarton !" exclaimed he, with flashing eyes, "if you accredit me with mean motives you will force me to speak unpalatable truths."

"What else can I infer when you confess that you have never loved me ?"

"I am no Mammon-worshipper ; I thought nothing of your fortune. It is not for money that I would bind myself in an uncongenial union ; money could not compensate me for what I should have to surrender in yielding up a profession I love for the sake of a woman I do not love. I have made up my mind to withdraw my application for retirement, and intend returning to India. I cannot give up my profession for your sake ; I cannot make such a sacrifice ; and, what is more, I can never give you such love as would satisfy your jealous nature. My soul is in my profession ; I will not give it up ; and now it is for you to decide what the ultimatum shall be. If you hold me to my engagement, knowing that there is no love in my heart for you, you must make up your mind to follow the drift."

Theresa Dumbarton had listened in transfixed astonishment to the daring confession of Captain Fitzmaurice ; and she was speechless with rage and indignation. She loved this man, and would even have made the sacrifice for him which he proposed ; but the knowledge that she was not loved by him was too bitter ; and the belief of her

having been supplanted by fair Gabrielle Strathway was the drop too much that made her cup full to overflowing ; thus, for a short space she sat almost rigid under the power of contending feelings, all too deeply humiliated to give utterance to a word in reply to his rather unconciliatory speech.

"Have you considered the matter fully?" asked Captain Fitzmaurice, who had grown weary of the silence, and feared that Theresa wavered as to the decision she should make ; but this question recalled her to a sense of her position, and the necessity of mastering the emotions which had made her for awhile weak under their influence ; then she rose to her feet and spoke.

"Think you that I have no pride, Captain Fitzmaurice ?" answered she, in a tone she intended to be haughty, but the trembling of which told all too plainly the pain, the sharp agony that had pierced her passionate soul. As she spoke she looked at him with cold contempt, notwithstanding the cruel pangs her heart was enduring, uttering again, "Think you I have no pride ?"

"Quite the reverse," said he ; "I know that you have a great deal of pride, but not exactly what one would style a proper sort of pride."

The shot told, as he had intended it should, and she turned pale as death, for she knew how she had stooped to win Captain Fitzmaurice ; but in a cold, hard tone she replied, "Is it your release that you want, Captain Fitzmaurice ? I give it to you ; you are free to wed the chit who has taken your fickle fancy and drawn you from your allegiance to me."

"You may spare your venom, Miss Dumbarton. Miss Strathway has not drawn me from allegiance to you, for I never was truly loyal in heart to the contract under which I bound myself."

"Then why did you keep up an appearance of regard that you did not feel—why only now make known your sentiments ?" she asked.

"I had made a false step and did not see my way out of the difficulty I had got into, so let matters go on ; but you must have been somewhat obtuse in not seeing that you had not inspired my soul with love."

"You are insulting, Captain Fitzmaurice ; I would never hold a man to an engagement against his will, far less one who could so far forget the respect due to my feelings, towards which you have been anything but considerate, to say the least."

"I may have spoken unguardedly, but

did not intend to insult you. ' It is far better that you should know the truth, and not allow me to marry you fretting under the chains that false delicacy would not sever. We are totally unsuited to each other, and never could be happy together."

" You have discovered our uncongeniality very suddenly," remarked Theresa, with bitter irony in her tone.

" No, indeed, I but too soon realised the fact of my having made a great mistake ; you possess not one quality to draw my heart with tenderness towards you. Your temper is so irritable, you are so exacting and dictatorial, and my own disposition is not so amiable as to submit tamely to be dictated to ; therefore, with two such unyielding spirits fettered for life, what would home be likely to become but a very—"

" Hot place, certainly," she interrupted, as he hesitated in uttering the terrible word to finish the sentence, and a harsh, unpleasant laugh followed those parts of speech she had supplied. " You are truthful if not complimentary," she went on, in hard tones. " We understand each other perfectly now, and are agreed upon one point, at all events—that we are totally unsuited to each other. You have just given me most palpable proof of this fact, for I could never tolerate a husband whose coarse expressions would be likely to shock my sensibilities continually."

This arrow was barbed, and it tore the heart at which it was aimed, for Captain Fitzmaurice was not in the habit of using coarse language ; but he had in a moment of unusual excitement almost committed himself to an unrefined comparison relative to the domestic region, and he felt that in losing his temper he had given her an advantage over him, even though the repulsive word had not passed his lips. But this woman was not so superbly refined as to have made this objection to him had she not known that he desired to break his chains ; he knew it, and so responded with equal irony to her remark thus—

" Of course, grapes that are sour are not worth the gathering." This was a sharper arrow even than that which she shot at Captain Fitzmaurice, and it was with great difficulty she controlled the tears from gushing forth ; but by a strong effort she managed to check their rising, and haughtily turning towards him, she thus addressed him—

" I have nothing more to say to you, Captain Fitzmaurice, than this—that no serpent's poison is deadlier than the vengeance of a woman's scorn, and the time will come when you shall know that a

woman's hatred is far stronger than her love ; that her heart will find no rest until her wrongs are avenged. I have loved you, William Fitzmaurice—loved you as it is not possible for many to love ; and had you but given me your love in return you might have moulded me into whatever you pleased. I have felt all too keenly that your heart gave not to me the same wealth of affection that I had thrown away upon you, yet still hoped to win a larger share ; but last night I realised the cruel fact that to another you had given what I had sacrificed my dignity to obtain. Yes, I confess it ; and also that your taunts on this score have wounded me beyond measure. You have been cruel ! Those cold, cowardly taunts have frozen the heart which, I own, warmed but too readily towards you ; yet you might have spared me the humiliating reminder that I had made the fact too apparent. You have outraged the most susceptible feelings of a woman's heart ; you have wounded deeply my pride, my delicacy, and have turned my heart to stone ! Yes, this heart is now cold, and love is dead ; *here* it can never live again," added she, striking her heart like a tragedy queen. " But one passion now holds sway within my bosom, that of hatred — dark, dread, inextinguishable hatred, the power of which I bid you beware ! "

" It cannot hurt me," replied he, with a provoking laugh.

" Think you so ? then live in your self-satisfied unbelief—live in your vain security ! But I tell you that the day will come ; and I will not take my revenge by half-measures. I will bide my time ; and as heartlessly as you have destroyed my dearest hopes, so will I compass the ruin of yours, Captain Fitzmaurice ! "

" These are idle words," he said. " You may have the will, Miss Dumbarton, but the power will not be yours, for the ocean will ere long roll between me and your vengeance."

" Lay not that flatteringunction to your soul. In the years to come there will be no abatement in this desire ; and if not on you, on those dear to you, I will wreak the revenge that thus alone can be appeased. Now, go ; and take with you the assurance that my soul will know no rest until I have fulfilled my vow—till I have made life a curse to you !" Having thus delivered herself, Theresa Dumbarton strode past him, opened the door, and motioned to him to leave her presence. Silently he obeyed the haughty gesture, and made his exit, only too happy to have been so easily freed.

He felt that he had been justly scorned, as he had not acted quite in accordance with the strict rules of honour which he had before advocated, for his heart told him that he would have gone on to the consummation of matrimony, regardless of family jars in contemplation, had not his fancy been taken by fair Gabrielle Strathway, whom he had resolved, if possible, to win for his wife. He had not told a direct lie, but he had been guilty of a subterfuge, and he consequently felt some qualms of conscience and a little humbled in his own estimation as he left Theresa's presence.

Calm and stately she stood as he bowed his adieu to her ; not a muscle of her face relaxed until she saw him stride past the windows down the garden path and vanish from her sight ; and then the pride that had supported her through the interview gave way, the pent-up feelings burst forth. She clasped her hands frantically, and beat her bosom wildly, when she realised the stern fact that he was hers no longer, had gone from her for ever ; and then the overstrained nerves gave way, and with a cry of anguish she fell prostrate upon the floor, rigid as in death, the victim of a love that had centred itself with terrible strength in this man who cared not in the least for her.

Theresa Dumbarton lay to all appearance dead, when some time later she was found by the servant who came to announce that luncheon was ready. The maid had been to her boudoir and bed-chamber, but, not finding her there, had sought her in the library, where she discovered her inanimate form lying prostrate as though death's stroke had suddenly fallen upon her. The girl shrieked aloud and fled from the room to the presence of General Dumbarton, who was awaiting his niece's appearance at the midday meal ; and with a white, scared face the maid informed him that Miss Theresa was dead. There was a general rush made to the library, and the still lifeless form was raised and taken to her bed ; and there Theresa lay for many weeks, hovering between life's fitful brightness and death's overshadowing gloom—dead to the hopes that had but lately been hers ; dead to the wrong, the grief that had borne down her spirit and quenched all its aspirations for ever towards any noble and tender influences. The constraint Theresa had put upon her feelings had been too much for her ; the forcing back of tears which would have relieved her swelling bosom, oppressed with rage and mortification, had made the hot current of life to surge up to the brain, and in a fit

she fell down, and there had lain in happy unconsciousness of the ruin of her life, for the internal struggle had conquered for a time both bodily and mental energies. After this breakdown, fever ensued, and for weeks this proud beauty lay in the helplessness of childhood, and no one expected that she would ever rise again from her bed to renewed strength.

But youth holds tenaciously to life, and with inconceivable energy battles with the dread foe, striving to wrest from it the dearly-clung-to-hopes of existence. Where no organic disease is, the vital spark is hard to quench ; and so Theresa Dumbarton's strong vitality bore her through the struggle with the fell destroyer, and she broke from the chains under which she had been held in weakness of body and mind. Yet from the grasp of the vanquishing power she rose not subdued in spirit, but with all the evil traits of her character stronger within her, and holding ascendancy over her.

Captain Fitzmaurice had not fully negotiated for the sale of his commission, and he lost no time in getting his leave cancelled, and then made his arrangements for returning to India at once ; and on the same vessel that brought him back Gabrielle Strathway went under the charge of Major and Mrs. Errington to join her father and mother. Her two younger sisters, whose education was not considered completed, were left at the seminary at which she had been educated ; and thus during the voyage the attachment that had germed on that night at the theatre grew and strengthened, and soon after their arrival at Bombay, Captain Fitzmaurice made known to Colonel Strathway the sentiments he entertained, and asked him for his daughter's hand in marriage, to which he gave a willing consent, knowing Gabrielle loved the young soldier.

When the announcement of the marriage in the *Times* met Theresa's eyes, her lips wreathed in a scornful smile, while her heart registered a second and more vengeful vow to work ruin on her former lover's happiness. Colder and more stern she grew ; but not for the sake of him who had deserted her did she intend to wear the willow before the world ; far from it—she resolved on assuming utter indifference, and also determined on accepting the first eligible husband who should offer himself, and become a distinguished personage in the state of matrimony.

Thus, from amongst a host of admirers she chose a Polish noble, Count Jablonska, who was endowed with a vast amount of wealth and a considerable degree of

ugliness. But while holding the mainspring on which life's enjoyment worked, what did it matter to her? for manly beauty had destroyed her peace, and so long as she could shine resplendent in jewels, and be the leader of fashionable circles, the envy of her own sex, the bowed-down-to of the opposite, the renowned for beauty, accomplishments, grandeur, hospitality, and charity to make her name honoured—what cared she if the man she wedded were perfection or as hideous as the Veiled Prophet, since to the altar she could carry only a dead heart?

No offspring blessed her union; had such been granted her, the icy bosom might have been thawed, and the softer emotions of womanly nature once more stirred within it. But after three years only of married life her husband was taken from her in a very sudden manner—killed by being thrown from his horse, and she was left in youth a widow with an immense fortune, for he had settled his entire wealth upon her, which, in addition to her own pretensions, made her a prize indeed in the matrimonial mart, but one not to be won again either for love or for interest's sake; for the world held not for her a hope or an aspiration save that of revenge on him who had made life to her but a dreary blank, for but for him her heart might have responded to another love.

It was not until her sister's death that her heart awakened to interest in any one; and then it would have been stony indeed had not the chords of sympathy been touched by the fair young charge who was left to her by her dying sister to befriend.

Gertrude Dumbarton had married contrary to her uncle's wishes, and there had been no intercourse between them saving an occasional letter when her money was remitted to her; for General Dumbarton considered a struggling artist, although a gentleman, a very ineligible husband for his niece, and he resented her disregard of his advice in the matter, believing that the man coveted her fortune, which was not so. He had vainly struggled to gain fame, like many others; and Gertrude found a sad reverse in life, for her fortune gradually melted away through drawing so frequently on the capital to enable them to live. Her husband's health had failed through over-taxing his energies, and through disappointment at his unremunerated labours, he fell into bad health; and then a lingering illness with protracted suffering rendered him incapable of carrying on his labours, causing him to become entirely dependent on his wife's means for existence; and as his continued illness

caused a heavy outlay, the funds became considerably reduced. She nursed her husband with the tenderest care, but her strength was not equal to the strain on her energies in day and night attendance on him, and utter prostration of the nervous system followed. Thus, not many months after the death of Ferdinand Leonard his wife was gathered to the tomb in which he reposed, and Hyacinth, her only child, was left an orphan.

The sisters had been long estranged through this unfortunate marriage; but when Mrs. Leonard became aware that her own life was about to terminate, she sent for her sister Theresa, to the care of whom she left her little girl; and the desolate-hearted woman undertook the charge, with a promise to her dying sister to watch over her with a mother's care; and this sweet, engaging child seemed sent by Heaven to soften the hardness of the Countess Jablonska's heart, and to win her to gentler instincts.

The loving attentions of this bright little girl soothed the sore heart of the Countess, and won her from dwelling on the burning memories of her humiliation. Hyacinth had heard from her mother that the early life of her aunt had been blighted by the desertion of a lover to whom she had been most devotedly attached, which circumstance had caused her nature to become hard and stern; and the affectionate girl felt a tender pity towards this cold, proud woman whose happiness had been wrecked, and who dragged on a life of ruined hopes without a tear, without a sigh over the memory of what she had lost. But none knew that this apparent calm was all upon the surface, and that many a stormy conflict raged within her breast in the hours when no eyes could mark the strife with the feelings that tore her inmost soul. Alas! none could draw that wretched woman from her haunting memories, when in the midnight hours she lay with wakeful eyes and excited brain, ruminating on the past. No, none could ever know what the dreary hours of midnight were to that self-contained woman whose disappointment had never found utterance; how the spirit groaned when none could hear; how the fiery passion of revenge flamed within that heart; how the restlessness of hope deferred of finding vengeance made her bitterest torture and caused her downy bed to be one of thorns.

But Hyacinth's tenderness might in time have softened her aunt's heart even to the subduing of this thirst for revenge which she had nursed when no love seemed destined to be hers, had not the demon

spirit been again aroused to fury by a coincidence later on which made all the jarring chords of the past ring a discordant peal within her breast, and set it on fire once more with stronger and more fiendish desires. So it was that the years glided on, the serpent slumbering, but still nursed, within her bosom, at last to uncoil itself, and with its subtle poison to doom to death an innocent victim. "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord;" and who shall thrust the weapon unto death when it is His will that it shall not do its deadly work?

#### CHAPTER IV.

**C**APTAIN FITZMAURICE'S marriage had proved a very happy one, for he was a most devoted husband, and his wife loved him almost to idolatry. She had brought him with her deep and tender affection a handsome dowry, which he had not calculated on, for his love had been perfectly disinterested. He thought not of gold when he sought the fair Gabrielle Strathway for his wife; he knew not that her father had married an heiress, and that his bride would bring him aught save the love he coveted, and was only surprised when the deeds were placed in his possession, showing him that she was not portionless.

There was but one thing wanting to make their happiness complete, one wish only of their hearts ungratified—the desire to have a son, and this had been denied them. Six daughters had been born consecutively, three of whom had died in early infancy; and after a lapse of ten years all hope was yielded up of a male heir being granted to them.

But when it had been believed by all that no more olive-branches were to flourish in the Fitzmaurices' home, there came one day to the regiment the startling announcement from the Nielgherry Hills, where Mrs. Fitzmaurice had gone for the benefit of her health, that the long-denied wish had been granted, and a son, a noble boy, born. Mrs. Fitzmaurice's life had nearly been the sacrifice in the bestowal of this precious gift to her husband, whose desire for it had been even greater than her own; and as she continued in a weaker state of health for some time after, it was deemed advisable that she should return to England to recruit her strength.

The three daughters had been sent home a few years previously, to be put to school; and they were, after their mother's arrival in England, placed in a seminary in France, where they remained for several years. There also Fate had placed

Hyacinth, Leonard; and a great intimacy sprang up between these girls. They had become drawn together in very close ties of friendship, particularly Geraldine, to whom Hyacinth's heart went out at once, for in many respects the tastes of these two girls harmonised, and thereby the bonds of friendship became more closely cemented. But Hyacinth knew not these friends by the name of Fitzmaurice, but by one only recently assumed, under which they had entered the seminary, having resigned that of Fitzmaurice when they left the Misses Lowther's establishment in Kensington.

Colonel Fitzmaurice remained in India until he had served the appointed time to entitle him to retirement on full pay; and the reason he bore no longer the name of Fitzmaurice was because he had unexpectedly come into property through the death of an old uncle, an elder brother of his mother, which had necessitated the change of patronymic to that of the maiden one of his mother; so under the name of Blencairne his wife had returned to England. Thus, then, had Hyacinth only known these new friends by their recently assumed name, for they had never mentioned to her that change of name had been necessary; and had she been told of the circumstance, she would still have remained in ignorance of their being the daughters of the man against whom her aunt entertained such an invincible hatred, for she had never been told by her mother who was the person that had made the ruin of her aunt's happiness.

As soon as Colonel Blencairne returned to his native country, he and his wife settled themselves with their baby-boy at Dunoon, and thither went Hyacinth on a visit to her friends when school intercourse had ended by the completion of their education.

The Countess had allowed her niece to cultivate the acquaintance of the Blencairne family in entire ignorance of this name having been only recently adopted, and of Colonel Blencairne being no other than her *ci-devant* lover, Captain Fitzmaurice; she had been on a foreign tour, and had not seen the announcement in the *Times* of the change of name, and all unconsciously had she permitted her niece to accept the hospitality of those on whom her heart's direst hatred rested.

When Hyacinth described Mrs. Blencairne as the sweetest and loveliest woman, and Colonel Blencairne as one of the handsomest and most fascinating of men, Theresa smiled at her niece's rhapsodies, and thought that the charming pair who had so completely won Hyacinth's heart

would be an acquisition to her own circle, could she but make their acquaintance ; and she directed Hyacinth to write and invite her friend Geraldine to come on a visit to them ; but the invitation was declined, the excuse given of a prior engagement having been made to some other friends. So time went on, and no light was shed around the Countess as to the antecedents of the Blencairne family, whom Hyacinth thought none else could equal.

But the time was not far distant when with a startling shock the fact would be revealed to her that her own niece had eaten of the bread of her bitterest enemies ; and that Hyacinth had learned to love and respect those whose ruin she had resolved to compass. Nothing had transpired to raise in *her* mind the smallest suspicion as to whom these friends of her niece's were ; but from some details into which Hyacinth had entered, Colonel Blencairne had been led to the conclusion that the young friend of his daughter's was the niece of Theresa Dumbarton, whom he had believed to be dead ; as through her seclusion after her husband's decease, a report had gone abroad and reached him in the East that she had departed this life. From Hyacinth's late conversations, however, he had gleaned the assurance of her being still in existence, and he warned his daughters to give no confidences relative to the changes their circumstances had undergone, to let no hint drop as to what their name had been, for he did not see why their friendly intercourse should be disturbed through the enmity nursed in the bosom of Hyacinth's aunt, which it most certainly would be if the Countess became aware of the fact that her niece's entertainer was identical with the William Fitzmaurice who had wrecked her dearest hopes. Thus in the secrecy observed Hyacinth continued to enjoy the hearty welcome extended to her by the man who had turned her aunt's happiness to misery.

But by an unfortunate coincidence the friendship of the younger members was doomed to be disturbed, though not annulled, by the clashing of life's dearest interests ; for Geraldine Blencairne's dazzling beauty caused her to become the rival of Hyacinth, while quite unconscious of the fact of a wrong being done to her friend.

While visiting a family in the Isle of Wight, Hyacinth had met a young sprig of nobility, Lord Jasper Wilde, who had become very much enamoured with her, and had gone nearly to the length of a proposal, when a sudden summons came for

him to attend the death-bed of his step-mother, who had been as a mother to him. He still kept Hyacinth in tender remembrance, and would have married her, had he not been thrown into the society of one far more lovely and attractive in every respect, in whose presence all memory of his former love was blotted out, her image for ever banished from his mind. Geraldine Blencairne was staying with a cousin of her mother in Yorkshire when Lord Jasper Wilde came to the neighbourhood on a visit to his uncle, Sir Lionel Mauder, who was on intimate terms with Mr. Frankfort, the husband of Geraldine's cousin ; and Lord Jasper at once lost his heart and all memory of the girl whom he had led to believe should become his wife.

Geraldine was the facsimile of her mother, whose beauty was of no common type ; and the same sweetness of manner that had distinguished Gabrielle Strathway lent its power to her daughter's charms. It was at a dinner-party at Sir Lionel Mauder's that Lord Jasper first met Geraldine, and his host had assigned to him the agreeable office of taking her in to dinner. During the repast the spell of her loveliness and winning grace fell over him and bound him in a trance of forgetfulness of aught else but her, even to the satisfying of his appetite. Geraldine was a very superior girl, a cleverer woman than her mother ; and she possessed innumerable advantages over Hyacinth besides that of beauty, for she had studied more, and had a wider store of information, a greater compass of intellect. Lord Jasper had never met one in whom so many rare qualities were combined, one so sweetly attractive ; and he left Sir Lionel Mauder's irrevocably, madly in love.

To Geraldine also had come an awakening from the common realities of life to a sense of a deeper feeling stirring within her bosom, an emotion she had never before experienced when ardent glances rested on her ; for the eyes that sought hers so continually with such earnest tenderness in them made her heart beat as it had never done before. Yet she knew not that these new feelings were the soft thrills of love playing for the first time on that organ whose music is sweet and silent, which breathes only to the sympathetic soul.

This tremulous happiness was love, which from the still depths was springing forth, and like some fair floweret through night's shade bursting from earth's tender bosom to show its infant petals to the light of day. Love ; yes, love which makes joy to some hearts and grief to others ; love

which makes life an Elysium or a desert of parched, dead hopes whence no green memories can spring to make glad existence. But let us hope that in the Elysian bower Geraldine's love may flourish fair, and fresh, and sweet ; that no storms of life may pass over it, and blight the brightness of its hopes ; that it may bloom on unshaken by life's tempests, as had that other love of which she was the offspring.

\* \* \* \*

Hyacinth Leonard had returned from the Isle of Wight in high spirits, since which time she had been living under a happy delusion, which was, alas ! to be but too soon rudely dispelled. She had informed the Countess of Lord Jasper's devotion to her, and of his having expressed his intention of coming to Windsor to pay his respects to her aunt, and the Countess Jablonska was almost as much elated as her niece at the conquest she had achieved, for she knew the Wildes to be an ancient and most wealthy family, and she could therefore desire no more eligible a husband for the girl in whom her soul was now wrapped up.

When in the Isle of Wight, Hyacinth had been on several pleasure-parties in Lord Jasper's yacht, and his attentions to her had been so marked that every one believed an engagement existed between them. But Lord Jasper had not gone so far as a declaration, though he had told her that he would lose no time in coming to see her as soon as it should be in his power after the obsequies were over ; and Hyacinth fondly trusted in all he said, little knowing how very soon Love sometimes spreads his wings and seeks another resting-place.

Thus had time flown by, and Hyacinth hoped in vain for the presence of him so dear to her, but she had neither seen nor heard anything of the gay Lothario who had made such faithful promises of a speedy return. Yet she never doubted, though she wondered at his delay, but kept hoping still, as so many do, that something unforeseen had happened to prevent his word from being kept. But while wondering and hoping in trembling expectation every day, a letter came, but not from him, although it brought tidings of him. This letter came to shake her trust in him which she deemed that nought could do ; and then a dark curtain seemed to fall over life's brightness for ever. She had taken the letter with a glad smile, but ere she had perused the first page her heart stood still with a deadly fear, for on that page was twice inscribed in endearing terms the name of him she loved, him she

believed to be her own. The letter was from Geraldine Blencairne, and it ran thus—

" I ought, dearest Hyacinth, to have replied to your kind letter long ere this, but I really have not had a moment to spare even to tell you of my great happiness, for Jasper is so very exacting, he will not allow me to think of any one but himself."

Hyacinth's heart beat wildly as her eyes rested on that name, and her cheeks and lips grew deathly white, a cold chill creeping through her veins, for a presentiment was stealing its shadowy form over her but now joyous spirit. Jasper ! who was this Jasper who thus appropriated her friend ? Was he another of the same name, or was he her Jasper, false and faithless to the love he had awakened in her bosom ? She read on with the terrible presentiment growing stronger, causing her breath to come in painful gasps—

" I must tell you the secret as yet unknown to any but my own family, for you being one of my dearest friends, ought to be made aware of the event about to take place shortly, particularly as you will be called upon to officiate on the occasion, and it will be necessary for you to think about your bridesmaid's dress."

The intangible fear, the creeping chill grew greater as Hyacinth read of matters having come to such a crisis ; she longed to know, yet dreaded to read on, and accept the certainty of what was only now a terrible suspicion, and she turned the letter upside down and held it so awhile ere she could summon courage to go on with the perusal of the next page, on which she felt her doom was written. Then she sighed a deep-drawn sigh, and proceeded—

" I have only been engaged six weeks ; engaged to one of the most —no, no, I will not descant upon him, you must form your own estimate of him ; but write soon and congratulate me. I met my love in Yorkshire, and ere I had been a week acquainted with him, Lord Jasper Wilde had made me an offer of marriage."

The letter dropped from Hyacinth's hand, and she sank into a chair, white and gasping. It was even so ; her friend had robbed her of her lover ; and, oh ! what mockery of her grief ! she asked her to congratulate her ; wanted her to stand and see the man she loved plight his vows to her ! How could she do it ? Slowly she picked up the letter, and read again—

" Jasper is very urgent that our marriage should take place at once, but papa will not hear of it ; he thinks it too soon after a burial to have a marriage. Jasper says it shall be a quiet wedding if he will say in three months' time instead of six. It has been love at first sight with us, as with papa and mamma ; and theirs has been such a happy marriage, and they are lovers still, as you must have observed. I cannot write another line, for Jasper

is calling me ; he has just come to take me for a drive, so adieu, dearest friend, with our united loves.

" Ever yours fondly,  
" GERRIE."

Hyacinth was stunned at first by the shock of her friend's announcement ; but at last tears flowed and relieved her aching bosom. She could not blame Geraldine, for she was ignorant of what had passed between Lord Jasper Wilde and herself ; she had never even named Lord Jasper to her, as she wished to give Geraldine a surprise when all should have been settled between them, believing herself sure of an unwavering affection. Thus she intended keeping her secret close, and only just to write as Geraldine had done, giving the information, with the request for her to act as her bridesmaid. No one but her aunt was to be made aware, and to her she had revealed the hopes Lord Jasper had inspired ; but now she found herself rivalled by her own friend.

As Hyacinth sat weeping, the Countess entered, equipped for a drive, and looked wonderingly at the drooping figure in the easy chair. " What is the matter, child ? " asked she, seeing the traces of tears. " I expected to find you ready ; go and get your things on at once ? "

Hyacinth gave a gasping sob, and said that she did not feel well, and would rather stay at home.

" You were well enough half-an-hour ago ; there is something in that letter that has upset you. Who is it from ? " taking up the letter and reading it, and then flinging it from her in wrath, she cried— " So another traitor steals a woman's heart and tramples upon it ! "

This was the first allusion she had ever made to her own early history ; but she was enraged, and for the moment was thrown off her guard. Then in scornful accents she added—

" And your dearest friend has taken your lover from you, eh ? "

" All unknowingly, auntie. I never told her aught concerning Lord Jasper ; I intended giving her a surprise when all should have been settled. Do not condemn Gerrie, auntie, for she is innocent of wrong towards me."

" Then keep your miserable secret, girl ; let none know that you cared for this traitor ; let the flame of love devour your heart if you will, but never let it escape your lips."

" But he will tell her, perhaps ; and she wants me to be her bridesmaid. Oh, how can I bear to see him marry her ! "

" You need not ; we will find some excuse," said the Countess.

" But she will hear of none, I know ; I must do what she asks."

" Rouse yourself, then ; do not fret about such a worthless thing as a man's love : strive to forget him ; get your things on and come with me."

" It will not be so easy to forget him, auntie. I loved him so well."

" Never let him know it, then, Hyacinth ; give him no such triumph as the knowledge that you mourn the loss of his love. Let pride support you."

" But, auntie, I am not so strong-minded as you are ; I could not do as you have done."

" What do you mean ? " asked the Countess, with flashing eyes and a livid face.

" Oh, forgive me, auntie. I meant not to wound you ; but I know—

" What do you know ? " interrupted the Countess, in great excitement.

" Only that you once had a disappointment. I should not have dared to remind you of it, but in the midst of my own pain I thought not of yours ; I believed, too, that you had buried all memory of that past."

" Great Heaven ! as if it could be buried but in my own grave ! " murmured she.

" Oh, auntie, I am so grieved that I should have alluded to it ! "

" How much do you know, girl ? Who told you ? " asked the Countess again.

" My mother. I know no more than that you had a sorrow such as mine to bear. Dear auntie, forgive my thoughtlessness."

" Let it pass, child. I know you would never do aught to pain me ; but your mother should have had more sense than to speak on such a subject to a child like you ; though for prudence she was never famed."

" Condemn her not, auntie ; she told me only to make me more loving towards you."

" It is well that you have reminded me of that time of suffering ; yes, and you can fortify yourself with the same pride which bore me through it if you choose. Pride stands us in good stead in such cases. Do not waste tears upon such a he ! Dry them now ; the drive will do you good. Yes, I will teach you to forget as I have done ; to forget ! " and then she laughed a bitter laugh.

So Hyacinth did her aunt's bidding ; got equipped for the drive, and returned home in better spirits, for the Countess did her utmost to divert her mind from the depressing subject. Hyacinth loved truly, but she could never love with that depth of passion which had made the death of her aunt's happiness, nor could she crush down feeling as she had done.

## CHAPTER V.

**T**HE next day a visitor came, a mutual friend of Hyacinth and Geraldine, Kate Campbell, who had been in the Isle of Wight when Lord Jasper had been so attentive to Hyacinth. She was not a little surprised to find her so calm under her disappointment. Kate had also been warned that she was to hold herself ready to officiate on the occasion, and she came to discuss the matter with Hyacinth; and the Countess said she must see about a suitable present for Hyacinth to make the bride.

Kate's letter was dated a day later than Hyacinth's, and gave further particulars—namely, that they were to come to London to be married, as Lady Featherstone desired that the wedding should take place there, and the bride and bridegroom to go to Wales, there to spend the honeymoon; after which they were to go to Etherington Court, in Westmoreland, the family seat of the Earl of Etherington, the father of Lord Jasper.

"Lady Featherstone!" exclaimed the Countess; "what is she to the Blencarne family?" a suspicion flashing upon her, she could not tell why.

"Lady Featherstone is Mrs. Blencarne's aunt," replied Kate Campbell; "but here is a photograph of Geraldine, it has long been promised to me, and she has been taken with Lord Jasper, and intends sending you one, Hyacinth. They are speaking likenesses of both, and had only just come from the photographer's. They are indeed a handsome couple; Gerrie is lovely, exactly what her mother was, they tell me."

"Let me see," said the Countess, excitedly.

Kate Campbell withdrew from its envelope the photograph, and put it into the extended hand of the Countess, whose bosom was heaving with passionate emotions, for the memories that had been revived so painfully were awaking the old enmity with redoubled force; and heart and brain were in a chaos, a wild tumult of conspiring ideas, and treacherous, cruel thoughts of some way in which to weave vengeance into friendship's offering to make me for those she hated. The thought had at once entered her subtle brain to make a bridal present the means of vengeance on this girl who had supplanted her niece, as her mother had rivalled herself; and to punish thus both wrongs, for she felt certain of the identity then.

With trembling fingers Countess Jablonska grasped the photograph: she looked upon the lovely lineaments, and then gave

a violent shiver, while an inarticulate sound escaped her lips, which seemed to have parted in acute pain; and then she sank down into a chair near her with a face white and distorted with the agony which had pierced her soul with the memory that this face forced upon her—the galling memory of that night at the theatre. It seemed as though Gabrielle Strathway's eyes looked again into hers, just as they did across to the box in which she sat on that fatal night when her happiness met its destruction, for the girl was the image of her beautiful mother.

"Are you ill, dear auntie?" asked Hyacinth, anxiously.

"No, child, it is but a spasm of the heart to which I am subject; it will pass away presently; you have no occasion to be in the least alarmed on my account, dear," responded the Countess.

"You look so very pale, auntie; let me get you a glass of wine?"

"No dear, nothing. I have a medicine which always relieves these attacks; it has subsided now, and I am all right again. You said Blencarne is your friend's name, did you not, Hyacinth?"

"Yes, Blencarne is the name," answered she.

"But that was not always their name," interrupted Kate.

"No; what was their former name?" inquired the Countess, in a voice that was strangely unnatural; and the tones were so tremulously subdued that Hyacinth could not help feeling uneasy, although her aunt had said she was all right again.

"Fitzmaurice was Colonel Blencarne's patronymic; his mother was a Blencarne, and he took the name on his uncle's demise, when he came into possession of the Blencarne estate."

"I see," replied the Countess; then rising, she added, "I will now go to my room for awhile, and you two can discuss the details of bridal arrangements, for which purpose you, Kate, have come, I am sure."

"You will take some of your medicine, auntie?" asked Hyacinth.

"Yes, dear, although I scarcely need it now." And then she left the room, with a steady step, as if nothing ailed her, but with a trembling heart.

But her agitation had not escaped the quick perception of Kate Campbell, and she caught a gleam of light therefrom, for she had one day overhead part of a conversation between Colonel and Mrs. Blencarne which she then did not understand. But now the secret chamber of Countess Jablonska's heart had been in a sudden

and unexpected moment opened to her view; and Hyacinth also had seen the curtain lifted from the sacred shrine, and then knew who had been the worshipped idol of that now cold and apparently unimpassionable woman's heart; and the revelation pained her excessively, for the daughter of the man who had wronged her aunt was her dearest friend; and the mother of that friend had stolen her lover from her as Geraldine had unconsciously taken hers.

The coincidence was a remarkable one; and she could not but feel that her aunt viewed the double wrong as an aggravating circumstance, and was not therefore surprised at its having overcome her. But she never could have conceived a notion of what a terrible tragedy would be performed in consequence on the bridal-day—of a devilish plot being concocted through revenge, to wipe out the debt which the Countess owed of hatred to that man. That her aunt's brain could work out a scheme so vile to bring everlasting sorrow upon a happy home she could never have dreamed.

When Countess Jablonska reached her own chamber she stood with clasped hands upon her forehead for awhile, as if gathering together her scattered reasoning powers into some firm resolve; and as she stood trying to collect her ideas her face wore a very evil expression. But presently she withdrew those jewelled fingers from her brows, and clasped her hands upon her bosom as if to crush its inward pain. For a short space she stood thus, and then once more came from her lips the malignant vows she had registered in her heart, the vow to work ruin to that man's peace who had deserted her and scorned her; and thus came forth her cruel soliloquy—

"The time is at hand, William Fitzmaurice, for me to pay you back according to your deserts. I have waited long, and almost hopelessly, for the hour of revenge, but the sweets I had begun to despair of ever tasting are now within my reach. Ay, revenge is sweet indeed! and how unexpectedly the opportunity for it has come, and how easily to be carried out, too. How wondrously like the girl is to her mother! she who came between me and the dearest hopes of my heart! and now this same hateful loveliness is it to wreck the happiness of my sister's child? the only human tie to which I cling am I to see doomed to despair like my own! This is not to be borne! twice thwarted, two hearts sacrificed under the same cruel spell of beauty's power! It shall not be. Though Hyacinth may never marry this man, *she* shall not!

no, never shall the bond of union be consummated to make *her* blessed at Hyacinth's expense. This is *his* favourite daughter, too, they tell me, this Geraldine, who owns her mother's treacherous loveliness, the witching spell of which deadened his heart to my own charms."

Again she clasped her hands, and wrung them frantically, for the memory was as a scorpion sting in her bosom; and then again she broke into passionate murmuring.

"Ay, William Fitzmaurice, the time is at hand when you and I shall be quits, when the debt of vengeance shall be paid, and the bridal feast shall be to thee a feast of tears. Even as my heart has burned in the furnace of despair, so shall thine, and hers; and even as mine has bled shalt thine weep tears of blood!"

\* \* \* \* \* Happy was the heart of Geraldine Blencairne while writing the letter that had pierced Hyacinth's breast with cruel pain; but had she known this her own happiness would have been greatly marred. Had she been aware that Lord Jasper Wilde had trifled with Hyacinth as he had done, she, in all probability, might have steeled her heart against him, for Geraldine was not a girl given to vain triumphs in subduing hearts which had owned allegiance to others; and had she believed her lover to have been guilty of so cruel and dishonourable an act as that of deserting Hyacinth for her sake, she would never have accepted his addresses.

But "ignorance is bliss;" and so Geraldine's happiness remained undisturbed through her ignorance of the part Lord Jasper had acted. She had wondered at Hyacinth's tardiness in offering her congratulations, and also at the spiritless tone of her letter when it did come; but not the faintest shade of suspicion as to the real cause ever crossed her brain, for she knew not of Lord Jasper's acquaintance with her fiend, as he had never named Hyacinth to her. He had indeed forgotten all about the fair, light-hearted girl who had taken his fancy for a time, the mention of her name not even reminding him.

The preparations were going on rapidly for the approaching nuptials, and the home of the Blencairnes was full of mirth and happy excitement, in contemplation of the coming event. Dresses and jewels caused many an animated discussion, and Colonel Blencairne declared that his house was turned upside down, and that he would not sanction another marriage for many years to come, their heads being all turned with the fooleries of fashion; sometimes he would chafe his wife and accuse her of

trying to look as young as her daughters, for in truth Mrs. Blencairne's appearance was so very youthful that she had frequently been taken for an elder sister whilst out walking with her children.

Proud indeed was Colonel Blencairne of his still beautiful wife and of his three fair daughters; but his noble boy was the very apple of his eye, and he, like Geraldine, bore a striking resemblance to his beauteous mother. There was not a happier home than that of Colonel Blencairne, for within it love and harmony reigned; and in the midst of so much true joy he had never given a thought to the vows of vengeance with which Theresa Dumbarton had determined to blight his life. And now no thought obtruded itself, although she would soon know with whom her niece had been so closely associated—no thought that it was in this woman's power to carry her threats of vengeance into execution. His heart was untroubled by any apprehension of perfidy from this old love who, perhaps, during all the years that had passed since that time, had forgotten her wrongs and buried their memories for ever.

Under Hyacinth's sweet influence he believed that she must have become a better woman; and so she had in all save this one over-ruling power which held her still in Satan's chains. But he knew not that a wronged woman, with a proud nature like Theresa Dumbarton's, can never bury the memory of a love rejected, for it is the bitterest drop in life's bitter cup, to know a passion unreturned.

Geraldine had conceived a strange fancy, which was to keep Lord Jasper in entire ignorance of who were to be her bridesmaids, determining to have a train of very fair ones to surprise this connoisseur in female loveliness. In vain he beseeched to know who, beside her sisters, were to officiate; but she would not gratify his curiosity, only admitting that three of the sweetest of flowers would bloom in fresh beauty to grace her bridal train—Rose, Violet, and Hyacinth. But as she jested thus in the full joy of her heart, she never dreamed that her happiness had been bought with the tears which had drenched the pillow of her friend.

\* \* \* \*

"Hyacinth, I think we had better go away for a change for a short time," said Countess Jablonska to her niece, a few days after the visit of Kate Campbell. "I have been wishing to vary our late monotonous life, and fancy that a trip to France will be both pleasant and beneficial to us both. I am sure it will be charming in

Paris now. You will like to go, will you not, dear?"

"Yes, auntie, I shall be so very pleased to go; and in Paris I am sure we will be able to find a suitable present for Geraldine."

"Yes, dear, in Paris we shall certainly find something elegant enough to grace the person of your *beautiful friend*."

Hyacinth thought that her aunt's words were strongly emphasised and marked with irony. "Your *beautiful friend*" could bear two interpretations; but she knew that Geraldine had not intentionally wronged her, and so she took no notice of the sarcastic tone, or what the words were intended to imply. There was no doubt now in her mind of the identity of Colonel Blencairne with her aunt's recreant love, for her agitation on beholding the photograph, and the few words she had let fall regarding the traitor, were sufficient to prove to her the fact; and she made allowance for the irritability caused by combining events, and therefore made no comments on her remark.

To Paris they accordingly went; and in the constant round of sight-seeing and shopping, Hyacinth's mind was diverted in some measure from her disappointment, and her spirits regained somewhat of their former buoyancy, while her aunt seemed to have recovered her usual serenity. She took surprising interest in inspecting the various articles of chaste workmanship in jewellery displayed before her; but she appeared hard to please, finding nothing she deemed exactly what she would like as a present for her niece to make to the bride of Lord Jasper Wilde.

Upon one occasion she addressed herself in a language that Hyacinth did not understand, and the jeweller replied to her in the same; and then, bidding Hyacinth to remain where she was, she accompanied him into an adjoining room, where she remained for some time closeted with him. She had spoken in Italian, not wishing Hyacinth to know what she wanted, which was a private interview to discuss without reserve as to what she wished to have.

The Countess was aware of this man's having in his possession some ancient relics, ornaments of uncommon design and elegant workmanship, jewellery of great value of the time of Catherine de Medici, and it was her wish to see them, and choose something as a pattern. Amongst the articles he showed her was a bracelet of gold and enamel, some details of which he gave her. It was a serpent, the head of which was studded with precious stones, the body being flexible

and from its mouth hung a heart, also studded with gems, diamonds, and emeralds ; he also showed another similar to the first, but with rubies and diamonds. He told the Countess of the way in which they had come into his possession, and entered into all the minutiae regarding them, and she then decided on having two of the same pattern, and gave him strict instructions regarding them. One was to have emerald eyes, this was for the bride, and the other to have ruby, which was for Hyacinth to wear at the wedding of her friend. These bracelets were of Venetian workmanship, and exquisitely beautiful ; and after the Countess had given full directions she placed in the man's hand a bank-note of a very large amount, which the obsequious tradesman received with a profound bow, and the most voluble and grateful acknowledgments of her munificence ; and then the Countess Jablonska returned to her niece with a face beaming with smiles, and told Hyacinth that she had found something worthy to adorn so fair a bride as Geraldine Blencarne, the betrothed of Lord Jasper Wilde.

"But why not have let me see it ?" asked Hyacinth.

"No, dear ; I wish to surprise you, for you have never seen anything of the kind yet, and you and your friend are to have ornaments nearly alike—something beyond your conception and my powers of description."

"Dear auntie, you are so very good to me ; how can I ever repay you for all you have done for me ?" responded Hyacinth, warmly.

"Name it not, child. Are you not my own flesh and blood—the only living tie to bind me to earth ? On whom else should I spend the wealth in which my heart finds no enjoyment ? To whom leave it when I die but to you, my sister's child ?" Thus spoke the Countess as she and her niece drove homewards, and Hyacinth took the hand of her aunt and kissed it with tears of gratitude in her eyes, for she truly loved this stern woman.

But, alas ! this poor girl little knew what to her was to be the cost of her aunt's affection for her—what the doom that this aunt's love would bring upon her. Oh, if she could but have seen into the heart that gave her all of tenderness that was left in her nature ! Oh, if she could but have known the wickedness of that heart in which love for her only dwelt, she would have shrunk from her in horror as she would from a serpent !

The girl would fain have found some

excuse if possible for absenting herself from a ceremony that would be very painful to her to witness ; but she saw no way in which she could disengage herself from the promise she had made to Geraldine, and she had nothing for it but to brace herself with courage to stand the test of a meeting with Lord Jasper Wilde—a cruel trial indeed to stand at the altar and hear him plight his vows to her friend when he had all but told her that she should be his wife.

And he ; how would he feel when he saw again the one he had wronged ? Would the fair, sad face touch his heart, and make him sorrow for the one whose hopes lay dead ?

## CHAPTER VI.

**T**HE momentous day had arrived ; and the Blencarne family were all at Sir Humphrey Featherstone's mansion, preparing for the ceremony, which was to be performed at St. George's, Hanover Square. It had been arranged that Hyacinth should go early in the morning to Sir Humphrey Featherstone's and dress there, otherwise she would have had a long distance to come to join the bridal party. There were a large number of guests besides the Blencairnes in the house, and there was not a room to spare, or Hyacinth would have been asked to come on the eve of the bridal ; and she had but little time to be with her friend ere the process of the toilet commenced.

The cases containing the bracelets arrived from Paris the previous night, and the Countess told Hyacinth she was not to see them until the morning of the wedding, and had them put by her maid into Hyacinth's trunk, sealed and addressed ; and when the bride was about to be attired, Hyacinth went into her room with the two cases in her hand, and presented Geraldine with her present, opening the other case to show her own, and then she observed that the ornaments Geraldine was to wear were of rubies and diamonds, the gift of Lord Jasper Wilde.

"Oh, how lovely they are !" exclaimed Geraldine. "This one seems made to suit my ornaments," added she, pointing to Hyacinth's bracelet, "and I like it better than the green-eyed monster. Would it be quite the same to you, Hyacinth, to keep that one and give me the ruby and diamond bracelet ; it seems to me as if I only wanted that to make my set complete."

"It is quite the same to me, dear, which I have, so take which pleases you best,

with my warmest wishes for your happiness ; and as my ornaments are of plain gold, any bracelet will suit them."

At that moment Mrs. Blencarne put a case into Hyacinth's hand, a present from the bridegroom, a chain and pendant heart studded with emeralds, similar ones having been sent for each of the other bridesmaids.

"Well, this is strange," said Hyacinth, "for the bracelet is a capital match for it ; one would be inclined to suppose that Lord Jasper knew about them. But now I must go and get adorned, or I shall be late, for my hair is unruly sometimes, and I have so much of it," saying which she left the room.

Hyacinth was nervous in the operation of dressing, and the maid saw that her hands trembled, and her face looked very pale ; she observed also that tears sometimes suffused her eyes, which she vainly struggled to keep back. Hyacinth's nervousness retarded the progress of dressing, and caused her to be late, and a message came to tell her that the bridesmaids were all ready, only waiting for her, so hastily taking the bracelet from its case she put it into the maid's hand, and asked her to fasten it on for her.

As her maid clasped the bracelet, Hyacinth exclaimed, "Oh, how you have pinched me ! but never mind, thank you ; it will not hurt long, I dare say," and then she hastened downstairs and entered the carriage in which the others sat waiting for her.

For a little while she felt a burning in her wrist under the bracelet ; but in a short time it passed off, and she took no notice of the queer numb sensation that followed, and indeed all pain was forgotten save that at her heart when the bridegroom came forward to greet the bridesmaids. He started when he saw Hyacinth's pale, thin face, and his conscience reproached him as he looked upon her altered appearance, for the eyes that once shone with a merry light met his then, grave and sad.

"Is this my doing?" thought he ; "what a wretch I have been !" But the arrival of the bride put an end to his self-accusations, and then the procession made its way to the altar in due form.

As Hyacinth was kneeling she felt a sickening faintness oppressing her, a dull pain in her arm also. She was suffering too much to think of Lord Jasper or anything else, and it was with great difficulty that she suppressed a cry of anguish. Her arm felt like two to her, for it had become enormously swollen all round, and discoloured both above and below where the

venomous reptile entwined. With wonderful fortitude the girl bore her agony, never suspecting the real cause of it, for never could a thought against her aunt have entered her mind. She still believed that her flesh had been pinched into the clasp of the bracelet, and had no fear of dangerous consequences from it. But at last the torture had become insupportable, and she was fairly overcome by it ; and just as the ceremony was concluded the long-repressed anguish found voice in a low moan, and before the altar she fell in a strong convulsion. A spasm of acute pain seized Lord Jasper's heart as Hyacinth fell, for he believed that the poor girl had been overcome by the trial of meeting him again.

There was consternation throughout the edifice ; a rushing of the spectators congregated therein to see what had happened, some believing that it was the bride who had fallen into a swoon. But there was one whose eyes had never been withdrawn from the bride's form, who knew that it was not she ; one who had watched her in deep anxiety and cruel expectation during the performance of the ceremony, and still she saw her standing all radiant in her youthful loveliness. Then, when she saw another sink down at the altar's foot, she started to her feet, she forced her way through the crowd who in consternation looked on, for a frantic fear had rushed to her heart, a horrible foreboding which made her limbs tremble, her head turn giddy with the thought. Determinedly she forced her way through the throng, and many made way for this tall, stately woman, closely veiled, who had come to witness the ceremony ; but as she reached the altar's steps, and looked upon the prostrate form, she who had sat so still and calm until the terrible conclusion of the marriage rite, tore the veil from her face, and there stood revealed to the gaping throng the Countess Jablonska.

Yes, the Countess Jablonska, who had come to witness the union of two young loving beings, and to gloat over the cutting asunder of those happily bound ties by the stroke of death ; to see and rejoice over her own cruel act, the work of a fiendish nature ! But He who hath said— "Vengeance is mine," had covered with His protecting angel's wings the destined victim of a vengeful heart, and had doomed the Countess to a fearful punishment, by making the only being for whom her heart entertained a particle of love perish by her own murderous designs.

For one moment Theresa, Countess Jablonska, looked upon the bridal-party ;

the man she had so madly loved ; his lovely wife ; the bridegroom, and the bride standing beside him in all her wondrous beauty, but with fear, with horror depicted in her countenance ; one terror-stricken glance she gave them, and passed on to the rigid form lying prone before the altar, and then there met her view the blackened, swollen arm, and the green-eyed monster encircling it ; and in that moment she knew how Heaven had thwarted her fiendish purpose, and how the one she had doomed to a cruel death had been saved.

For a few moments she stood transfixed with a horror inexpressible, a wild, bitter agony of soul which was dreadful to look upon, in the conviction that her sin had recoiled on her own head, the self-condemnation of her own heart. In that silent abandonment to a voiceless grief, Countess Jablonska looked like a marble statue ; but into those downcast eyes there had crept a light—a wild, hunted expression, as she looked on the convulsive struggles of the suffering girl ; and her brain was reeling under the horror of her own work. The Higher Power had dealt His judgment kindly, and He had chosen his own victim ; her niece, her best-beloved, was the sacrifice to her vengeance ; and she was desolate—left without one being to love or care for her.

It was too much, this bereavement of all she held dear ; and as she gathered the assurance that Heaven had in punishment doomed her to a future all dark and dreary, the brain which had conspired and carried out this dreadful plot gave way, and when the eyes were raised from beholding her niece's torture they were filled with a maniacal gleam. With a wild cry of baffled rage and despair, she flung her arms above her head ; she forced her way through the astonished and terrified spectators, and rushed out of the church a raving lunatic. But as she fled screaming through the street she was secured by the police and taken to an asylum, where she dragged out the remainder of her wretched existence ; for reason had departed for ever from that subtle brain—now frenzied by unsubdued Passion's power—in the recoil of vengeance on herself.

This was a horrible *finale* to the bridal ceremony, and assuredly the marriage feast proved but a feast of tears, as this cruel woman had predicted ; for Hyacinth had been fondly loved by all her friends, and her sad end was a great grief to them ; thus the homeward procession was a dismal one indeed, the drawn blinds of the house proclaiming a tale of woe.

On the arm being examined by a medical

man, it was discovered that a deadly poison had been injected into the system through the punctured vein. As the bracelet was clasped around the victim's arm, the snap pressed from beneath the tongue of the serpent a fang which pierced the flesh with its sharp point, and which then sprang back as the snap closed in, and a virulent poison issued out, and passed into the wound, the venom being thus inserted into the vein that had been pierced, a glutinous matter first issuing and surrounding the puncture, preventing blood from escaping ; thus the poison continued to flow gently from the head of the monster, the head and neck of which had been charged with it. The unsuspecting victim while suffering such pain dreamt not of danger, and so she bore unflinchingly her torture, hoping soon to be released from it. An invention so cruel could never have been conceived by her ; it was most ingeniously contrived, most marvellously executed ; but a most perfidiously diabolical conception of heart and brain, beautiful in its naturalness, and, alas ! too natural in its fatal power. When the bracelet was removed from the arm the spring went back that had been pressed down by the snapping, the valve closing again on the fang and hiding it from sight ; and not until minutely examined and tested did this merciless instrument of death show the mystery of its mechanism, for only the pressure of the arm upon the spring caused it to act, and make the poisoning fluid flow forth.

It was never known whence the Countess procured this treacherously deadly ornamental weapon, for the only one who could have thrown any light on the subject was powerless to do so ; but it was only too well known for whose death it had been intended, for the fellow-bracelet on Lady Wilde's arm which had been given to Hyacinth was perfectly harmless. The similarity of the two presents might have disarmed suspicion had there been any idea of foul play, but none would have thought an infernal machine of such alluring beauty could ever have been invented for carrying out vengeance. It was not supposed to have been the emanation of Countess Jablonska's own brain, but that she had known of such horrible instruments for the destruction of life, and had had some one to aid her in obtaining it, whose conscience could be quieted by a handsome *douleur*. It was a foul plot, most skilfully carried out by a cold-blooded, unprincipled woman ; and had it not been for the matching of Hyacinth's bracelet with the bridegroom's present to his bride, she would to a cer-

tainty have been the victim, and would have suffered the horrible death of the innocent girl who lay a disfigured corpse, cut off from life in her youth and beauty, a sacrifice to malignant hatred.

A terrible gloom had fallen upon those who with joyful hearts had gone to the hymeneal altar ; and weeping was heard where mirth's glad voice only should have resounded. On the bride's fair brow, which should have been illumined with the light of her happy love, there hung the cloud of sorrow ; and with wild terror in her eyes she looked down upon the twin serpent encircling her wrist, as if dreading a similar fate, not knowing whether the same fatal power might not be secreted within its coils ; for she knew not then why one bracelet had been constructed as a subtle weapon of destruction, and the other harmless, while to all appearance exactly alike in every visible form but the gems with which they were set to distinguish them.

The mystery, however, regarding the true serpent power of the one was soon to be explained by her father, to whom it at once became apparent that revenge towards himself had been the motive actuating the Countess ; but he did not know that the second wrong committed by Lord Jasper Wilde had awakened to life the slumbering demon and instigated her to this cruel deed. It was not until long afterwards that he learnt from Lord Jasper's own confession that he had been an admirer of Hyacinth, and had nearly pledged himself to her ; and then it became plain why his innocent daughter had been the chosen victim of this cruel woman ; but Heaven had turned the weapon back upon the Countess Jablonska in a most frightful tragedy.

Horror filled every soul, and depressed every heart ; and tears flowed from many eyes that ought to have beamed only with smiles ; and the bridesmaids seemed like drooping flowers over which a terrible storm had passed and bowed their beauteous heads ; for to them it was a solemn warning of how soon life may be cut short in its early promise, as also a caution against the indulgence of rancorous feelings which, if cherished by a stern nature and uncurbed will, can lead to such horrible results as had occurred ; thus each learned a lesson never to be forgotten, and treasured a memory of one whose bright example was worthy of imitation.

Lady Wilde pressed a kiss of eternal farewell on the lips of the friend she had esteemed so warmly, and her eyes were overflowing with bitter tears as she departed

with her husband from that death-shadowed domicile ; but no superstitious presents relative to her own future intruded themselves to dim the prospect of her life as Lord Jasper's wife, for into that future she looked in the full confidence of a loving and trusting heart, with hopes of entire happiness. And Lord Jasper could not chide his bride for the showers that fell from her dear eyes, although they made his own heart sadder, for he knew how well she had loved the victim who had been sacrificed to spare her to him ; and though his own soul was very sorrowful for the fate of this fair girl, his first love, cut off in her early bloom, he yet breathed its silent thanksgiving to Him who had averted the doom from the beloved of his own bosom. His heart had condemned him when his eyes first rested on the changed face of the once happy Hyacinth, whom he had tried to win, and then left to sorrow over the fond dreams he had taught her to indulge in ; and he would fain have seen her living still and blessed with the devotion of some good man who could have appreciated her worth ; but to wish her back, spared from her fearful doom, he never could, for his own sweet love's sake, whose life would have been the forfeit, and he be left to drag out his existence in the agony of a widowed heart, mourning for a love that could never be replaced by another.

Hyacinth was fair and sweet as the flower the name of which was hers ; and as the years passed by in quick succession to the sacred anniversary of her cruel death, the day was kept in thoughts of her by all her friends ; and upon her grave by loving hands were laid garlands of those sweet spring flowers, with tears of true friendship flowing to consecrate these offerings to the memory of the dead ; while on the tomb erected to her in sacred remembrance by Colonel Blencairne were those sweet blossoms carved in clusters true as life, beneath which were engraved the words—

" Fairer than these, sweet Hyacinth, thou bloomest in Heaven."

If to live beloved is sweet, free from the heartburnings of jealous hearts, how much sweeter to be remembered under the shadows of the tomb, and thence to be recalled with praise and blessings on the name of the sleeper in death ; for alas ! how many pass into the depths of earth and there repose while heedless footsteps trample o'er the soil wherein the good and the forgotten lie, thought not of by those who should mourn their loss.

Theresa, Countess Jablonska, had absolved herself of the vow Theresa Dumbarton had made, but at what a terrible cost had she blighted those bridal rejoicings ! She had in some measure revenged herself on the man she had hated, but the deadliest portion had fallen upon her own head, for from that hour she was perfectly reasonless, the curse of insanity making life to her an utter blank ; and thus she continued until death claimed her, and in mercy took her, covering her sin in the silence of the grave. But she died amongst strangers, with no loving hand to minister to her comfort, and none to mourn her loss or to shed a tear upon her dishonoured tomb. Far away in the East was the only relative she possessed ; a cousin towards whom she had never had any kindly feelings, for Ernest Dumbarton scrupled not to tell her of her faults ; and so the cousins consequently became estranged from one another, for Theresa could not tolerate any one whom she knew to be observant of her imperfections, far less one who was daring enough to point them out to her, a liberty which Ernest thought he had a right to take, and delighted in doing.

This antagonism had been a source of vexation to General Dumbarton, as he had been desirous of a union between Theresa and his son ; but Ernest had so decidedly expressed his sentiments to be in opposition of any such relationship, and also declared that he wished the man joy of his bargain who linked himself with her, that his father, seeing there was no chance of his altering his opinion, gave up the idea altogether. So Ernest Dumbarton became the inheritor of the wealth of the Countess, which she had willed to Hyacinth, to prevent his claiming a share of it, and the possessor of some millions of money, besides jewels of great value. This was a lucky turn of Fortune's wheel for him, he being anything but a rich man, and having a large family of sons and daughters to be provided for, and so Dame Fortune was in this instance kind—dispensing her favours where they were truly acceptable, instead of lavishing them to be hoarded in the miser's safe, or to be wasted in prodigality. Ernest Dumbarton was one with a large heart and an open hand, and where the golden shower fell it brought forth richly ; for in the heart where the germ of generosity had lain powerless to spring and disperse abroad, it then be-

gan to grow and give plentifully of its fruit ; and the fortune that had thus so unexpectedly come to him helped to make happy many homes, for of his goods he gave not grudgingly, and his heart rejoiced in the power that had become his to make others glad.

Strange to tell, some years afterwards it happened that Major Dumbarton and Colonel Blencairne met again in London and renewed their former intimacy, for Major Dumbarton saw no cause for blaming Colonel Blencairne because he could not love his cousin, and assured him that he considered matters had been most mercifully directed in his escape from a female tyrant, whose temper would have made his life a curse to him had he wedded her.

This renewed friendship brought the younger members of the two families into social intercourse, and the natural results followed, for an attachment grew between Wilmot Dumbarton, a clever young solicitor, and fair Grace Blencairne, which was very soon consummated in wedlock's bonds, under happier auspices than the marriage of her sister with Lord Jasper Wilde. But not in the sweet spring-time, when hyacinths were in bloom, did this bridal *cortege* wend its way to the sacred edifice, nor to the same one in which the horrible tragedy occurred ; but when the bright summer sunshine glowed, and the air was redolent with varied flowers' perfume, did Wilmot Dumbarton claim his bride, and for their honeymoon they departed to the beautiful lakes of Cumberland.

Bright with smiles was the face of the lovely Grace, even while dewy drops hung upon her eyelids, for her joy was unmixed with sadness, save in the moment when bidding farewell to those she loved. But they were but as raindrops from a passing cloud, under the bright outshining of a happy hope of a speedy reunion with them again ; and a shadow fleeting away under the glowing of her husband's ardent passion, whose lips kissed from the lids the glistening drops as he drew Grace's head to his bosom, assuring her parents that he would cherish with tenderest care the sweet one they had given unto him. And they knew that his promise would be kept, and parted with their child in the full assurance of happiness being hers.

JESSY B.

# TEA-TABLE TALK.—BY AMY KEN.

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"ES, the holidays have arrived at last," said Annie ; " and we are all to pack up to-night, and in the morning proceed to Southampton. Some special treats are in store for us ; I don't exactly know the programme, but I heard mamma tell Aunt Ken she was quite right in her suggestions that we should travel a little out of our way to see places of historical interest, so that our minds might be enriched and our thoughts directed to objects which may hereafter afford us food for conversation."

" Bravo ! " replied Judith ; " I think aunt is just one of the *proper sort*—"

" Hush ! " said Edith ; " aunt wouldn't like you to introduce such horrible slang if she were here."

" Dear me ! " responded Judith. " Perhaps she would prefer my saying she was *improper* ? "

Upon this utterance Annie, Edith, Judith, and the rest commenced calling out " For shame ! " when Helena appeared and inquired what it was all about ; and upon being told, she slightly lectured the delinquent, though she could not see much to complain of in her words, and then, in answer to the mute appeal of her cousins, she said—

" I'll tell you the programme ; and my husband has given me permission to accompany you for a week out of the fortnight's trip your papa and mamma have planned out. First, we are to go to Southampton, visit Netley Abbey and the New Forest, and Aunt Ken will show us sundry places which are renowned in history ; and then we are to cross to the Isle of Wight, where new features will be explained to us."

" Oh, that will be joyful ! " sang Judith.

" I wish you would be a little more discreet," exclaimed Helena. " There are few things more unladylike than sudden exclamations of this kind : and, moreover, when the words seem to be taken from religious utterances the language is inexcusable."

" Well, Willie used the words when he came from school," replied Judith.

" Boys do many queer things," responded Helena ; " but young ladies should be especially careful not to follow their example, unless they desire to be called 'forward creatures,' as I heard an old lady call such the other day."

\* \* \* \*

In comfortable apartments " Above

Bar," at Southampton, Miss Ken and her pupils are located ; and they have determined to make the most of their time during this fortnight's holiday trip. The air is so mild and genial that already their spirits are elated ; and this has created in them a desire for adventure which is only subdued by Miss Ken's presence. They walk on to Southampton Pier, they look upon the clear Southampton water, and by the aid of a telescope they distinctly see the beautiful Isle of Wight, whose rich woods and fertile plains are made visible. They look inland, and see swelling uplands and fields laden with rich cereals, whilst lofty trees seem to invite them to take seats under their shady branches. The naked eye can even discern the thick foliage of the New Forest. But Aunt Ken asks them to walk along the outskirts and view the ancient town walls ; and she shows them a high tower, originally circular, and traces the long range of massy wall, which is proved to have been built in the time of King John, throwing abruptly out of its centre a semi-circular tower, with loopholes and a high parapet — still known as the Arundel Tower, from Sir John Arundel, who repulsed the French in 1370.

" These are all evidences," said Miss Ken, " that history is correct when it records certain events—the exact spot of its occurrence is very frequently given, and these serve very often to corroborate the facts given. Mr. Brannon, a very celebrated antiquarian, when speaking of Southampton, its various arcades and its ancient defences, says : ' The original Saxon or Norman remains were a series of magnificent palatial residences and offices, built at some distance from the water's edge to admit of private grounds and landing-places, yet sufficiently strong to be defended in case of necessity. When, after the lapse of two or three centuries, intestine wars and foreign invasions had pretty generally urged the necessity of better defences, this piece of wall, having several entrances with land before but no ditch, required, according to the principles of fortification at that time, machicolations, which, however, in their regular form would have rendered it too heavy at the top and called for the addition of several towers. To meet this difficulty piers were built against the wall, and arches bearing an advanced battlemented parapet con-

structed, so as to form a good rampart, with a complete screen to the defenders, who could thus direct their missiles to a distance or beneath their feet with great facility and security.' Now we come to the Bar Gate, which you see was supposed to take the same position as Temple Bar in London before it was pulled down. It is a remnant of the town walls, and persons were only admitted into the town through this or other gates when they had got the password, or were conducted in by known officials. The people—who call the part where we live 'Above Bar'—for the most part do not understand the term. This gate was, however, originally the north gate of the town, and approached by a drawbridge across the broad fosse which encircled the town walls on the land side. You see on either side gloomy figures of the giant *Ascapard* and the renowned *Sir Bevis*, and I will ask you when you get home to find out who these figures are supposed to represent. It will give you pleasant research."

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Up at an early hour next morning, Miss Ken and her pupils were *en route* to Netley Abbey, and passing through the pretty village of Itchen—where everybody looked so clean and neat, and yet so rural—they reached a knoll called Peartree Green, where elms and oaks grow in great luxuriance, and peeping through the woods is an ancient place of worship called "Jesus Chapel." The quiet and beauty of this spot induced the little party to halt, several of them regretting that they had not studied drawing, so that they might sketch this calm scene. Miss Ken was, however, equal to the occasion, and her facile pencil sketched a rude idea of the scenery. On again through shady lanes, ever and anon catching views of Southampton Water, they arrive at last at Netley Abbey; and here the party were at first disappointed, for the ruins themselves are nothing to ordinary visitors: it is only the antiquarians or archaeologists, who trace the boundaries of what was once a vast fabric, who look up history and see where the church was, the Lady Chapel, the Chapter House, &c.—these people alone take a deep interest in the ruins. There are also remains of the Abbot's House, and underneath this a plain vaulted crypt, which the little party entered from the outside of the Abbey, and were glad enough to make their exit, much as they said they longed for adventure the day previously.

"How old do you suppose these ruins to be?" asked Judith.

"This Cistercian Abbey, as it was called, was founded by Bishop Peter de

Rupibus in the reign of Henry III., and was dedicated to the Virgin and Edward the Confessor. On the suppression of monasteries in this country the site and manor were granted to the Marquis of Winchester, and afterwards sold to the Earl of Hertford, son of the Protector-Duke of Somerset; and here Queen Elizabeth was received in State in 1560. About 1700 the estate was sold to Sir Bartlett Lacy, who disposed of the materials of the abbey-church to a Southampton builder named Taylor, and the following well-authenticated story is recorded: 'After he had entered into his contract, some friends observed to Taylor that they would not dare be parties to the demolishing of holy and consecrated places. These remarks made a deep impression upon Taylor's mind, and when he went to bed that night he dreamed that in taking down the Abbey the keystone of the arch over the east window fell from its place and killed him. This dream he told to Mr. Watts, a schoolmaster of Southampton, and father of Dr. Isaac Watts, who advised him not to have any personal concern in pulling down the building. The advice, however, was insufficient to deter him from assisting at the work in person, and his dream was most unhappily realised; for, in endeavouring to remove some boards from the east window to admit light and air to the workmen, a stone fell upon and fractured his skull. The injury was not at first considered serious, but the doctor somehow made a bungle in extracting the splinter, and the surgical instrument entered the brain and caused immediate death.'

"That is a curious instance of a pre-sentiment being fulfilled—is it not, aunt?" said Helena.

"Yes; but you must take all the surroundings into consideration. Firstly, perhaps this Mr. Taylor worked nervously and hastily that he might expedite the demolition and get the feeling off his mind; and secondly, it is more than likely that the doctor had been informed of the circumstance and operated nervously."

"I don't like to dwell upon this feature," exclaimed Judith. "We have seen Netley Abbey, and I feel like the Englishman who saw the Falls of Niagara from a distance, and then packed up his portmanteau and returned home, saying, 'I have seen Niagara'; and this is the Netley Abbey that Horace Walpole and the poet Gray have pictured so gloriously!"

"If the ruins are not grand they are at least picturesque, and you see before you Nature in her brightest and best clothing, the trees in full foliage, and hear the birds singing sweetly in your ears."

## FAMOUS MEN AND WOMEN.

### LORD FREDERICK CAVENDISH.

THOSE who lived in London and other large towns on the 7th of May, 1882, will perhaps never forget the sensation created in their minds when they heard the newsboys in the streets crying out, "The assassination of Lord Frederick Cavendish and Mr. Burke." Many thought they were dreaming—afflicted by a horrible nightmare, or that they could not hear aright. A great many persons had gone to bed on Saturday night with the happy conviction that at last Ireland would be conciliated, and that the people would accept the missive of peace sent by Mr. Gladstone's Government through the hands of one of the most genial, best-disposed men in the British Parliament; but Sunday morning served to quickly dissipate these sanguine thoughts.

On Saturday, the 6th of May, Lord Frederick Cavendish was commissioned to go to Dublin as the Chief Secretary for Ireland, release the suspects in Kilmainham Gaol, and tell the people what beneficent measures were to be introduced for their welfare. No longer were the peasant-farmers to fear their landlords' wrath, but on easy terms they were to be made independent possessors of the soil; and Government aid was to be given them, whereby they could till the land and live as happily and peacefully in Ireland as their brethren who had become prosperous as immigrants on the other side of the Atlantic. Well-disposed people in England deemed the Irish peasants must now be satisfied, and rejoice over their good fortune, and that year by year they would go on progressing, until they had happy homesteads, and were prepared to shake hands with the English producers, and vie with them in their extent of crops, and their better subsistence. But, alas! Lord Frederick Cavendish was not to experience the gratitude of the people. Full of these conciliatory ideas, he made his way to the Vice-Regal residency, prepared his plans for the future; and feeling that he was on a mission of peace, he feared no adversary, and all unarmed he passed along Phoenix Park towards his new abode, accompanied by Mr. Burke, the Permanent Secretary to the Lord-Lieutenant, a man equally known for his humanitarian views, the best and truest friend of the tenant-farmer, and one who was loved and respected by every one.

It was just before sundown on a bright, clear evening, as these two beneficent men walked arm-in-arm through the Park, doubtless making arrangements for the future advantage of their fellow-men, when

the assassins' hands fell upon them from behind, and they were brutally murdered in broad daylight, and even within a short distance from persons who were enjoying their drives and walks in that beautiful park. In less time than it takes to tell the story the daggers had done their fatal work, and these two amiable men had ceased to exist.

With Mr. Burke's private history we cannot now deal. Suffice it to say, that he was a man much esteemed in private life, and that his sad and sudden end was the cause of intense grief to his family, and more especially a sister, to whom he was devotedly attached. It is with the other victim of this cruel deed that we have now to do.

Lord Frederick Charles Cavendish was the second son of the present Duke of Devonshire; he was born in 1836, and finished his education at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he graduated senior optime in 1858. Like his brother, the Marquis of Hartington, he desired to be a statesman, and studied politics at an early age. He was not a laborious plodder, but as a lover of rural recreation he always associated himself with the farmers as well as the aristocracy, and was accepted as one of the most genial young noblemen of the rising generation twenty years ago. Ready at all times to take part in healthful enjoyments, and be one of the foremost in promoting social harmony, never was there a more popular officer in the Lancashire Yeomanry Cavalry than Cornet Lord Frederick Cavendish; he sought no higher commission, though repeatedly offered to him, but a "cornet" he remained from 1859 to 1873; and there are many of that corps who drank his health in a bumper whenever opportunity served of showing their appreciation of a generous, genial nobleman, but who henceforth will in their social gatherings pay a silent tribute to the memory of a well-beloved officer.

But duty was never neglected for pleasure. From 1859 to 1864 he was selected as private secretary to Earl Granville, when Lord President of the Council. He was private secretary to Mr. Gladstone in 1872, and in 1873 was appointed a Lord of the Treasury; and when Mr. Gladstone came into power in 1880, he was selected as Financial Secretary to the Treasury—a very important position; but in the capacity he was successful in satisfying every one that he was the most efficient man who had ever been selected for that office.

As a member of Parliament he sat for the North Riding of Yorkshire from 1859

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LORD FREDERICK CAVENDISH.

to 1864; in 1865 he sat for the northern division of the West Riding of Yorkshire, and retained this seat until his last appointment as Chief Secretary for Ireland, which he then temporarily vacated; but his constituents were prepared to re-elect him without opposition when the melancholy event occurred which horrified not only the people of England, but the peoples of the world. A good, generous man, who wished to do his duty well and serve his country faithfully, is murdered in the very locality to which he had carried a missive of peace and conciliation. Space does not permit us to give the encomiums passed upon him in Lords and Commons by Earl Granville and Mr. Gladstone, as well as by the leading Conservative members; but it may be well to record that the released "suspects" respected the man, and looked, or affected to look, upon the crime of assassination with horror, although former speeches of the Land Leaguers show that the murder of innocent men is not entirely condemned by them. The words of Mr. Parnell, as addressed to the Irish nation, are so appropriate that we must quote them. He says:—

"I am pained and horrified more than I can express at the terrible and startling news which I only heard about breakfast-time this morning. I think the murders form one of the most atrocious and unprovoked crimes ever committed in any country, and its effect must certainly be most damaging to the interests of the Irish people. During my Parliamentary experience of six or seven years I have occasionally had personal communication with Lord Frederick Cavendish, and always found him one of the most amiable and painstaking of men with whom I have ever come into contact. He had a strict regard to the conscientious fulfilment of his official duties, whilst at the same time desirous as much as possible to accommodate himself to such local representations as might be made to him. I did not share the disappointment generally expressed in Liberal and Irish circles regarding his appointment to the post of Chief Secretary, as I anticipated that the principal reform to be prepared during the present session would consist of amendments of the Land Act, which would be under Mr. Gladstone's personal supervision, and the proceedings in connection with which would almost necessarily be of a strictly Parliamentary character. I believed that the administrative reforms would probably be somewhat postponed until they were more fully considered, and more accurate information obtained. I cannot conceive that any section of people in Ireland could have plotted deliberately against the life of Lord

Frederick Cavendish; and I am surprised that in Dublin the police who have been able to protect Mr. Forster during the whole of his administration should not have been able to protect this unfortunate nobleman. I trust that the people of Ireland will take immediate and practical steps to express their sympathy with Mr. Gladstone in his most painful position."

This sentiment was echoed by the other Home Rulers, and the dastard assassins were denounced by all. It only remains to be said that Lord Frederick Cavendish married in 1864 the Honourable Lucy Lyttleton, daughter of Baron Lyttleton, to whom he was devotedly attached, but there was no issue from their marriage. Her ladyship had a party of friends on that dreadful Saturday night. The sudden visit of Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone at so late an hour somewhat alarmed her; by slow degrees they announced her husband's death, the Marquis of Hartington, who accompanied them, not daring to come into his sister-in-law's presence. The blow was so great that the fond wife, when quietly told of illness and danger, rested on hope; but the final blow had to be given, and with tenderness and affection, with faltering words, the Prime Minister of England was obliged to say "He is dead." At first she could not realise so terrible a calamity, but by degrees she felt the shock, and nature gave way under such a terrible ordeal; and here we draw the curtain—a grief so deep must be too sacred for an historian to picture. The trying ordeal the Marquis of Hartington had to pass through was, however, only half completed. He had an aged father living at Chatsworth, who had written with a father's pride for a loved son that "Frederick was at last in a proper groove. He always knew there was something good in him." Fathers do have favourite sons, though their love is general, and Lord Frederick had a large place in his father's heart. The veteran Duke of Devonshire was in his 74th year, and could not bear much excitement. His eldest son, the Marquis of Hartington, therefore, thought it necessary to give up Cabinet Councils and public business and try to soothe his bereaved parent. The poor mutilated corpse of the murdered man was conveyed from Dublin to the family mausoleum, and every tribute of respect that could be paid was given to him. All the Cabinet attended his funeral, and two hundred and fifty members from both sides of the House were present. The scene was described as most affecting; and indeed the printed account was sufficient to draw tears from the eyes of all.



# LOVE, THE CONQUEROR.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "ROBIN IS SHY," "WEST LYNN," "TESSA," "STRONGER THAN DEATH," ETC.

## CHAPTER I.



I D S U M M E R - D A Y is drawing near; the weather is soft and bright, while we say that the sky is blue as it is in Italy—*we* being the young ladies of Bury House, who, by - the - bye, know no more of Italy than Italy does of us. Our holidays are coming on, so no wonder that we are glad, no wonder we gather in little groups and talk excitedly, as though we had never had a holiday-time before. Perhaps I am judging others by myself, for my schooldays are over—Bee Thring and I will not come back here again; so that is why we have dared, the one to lie on the soft grass in the "orange grove" (the said grove being a double row of syringas, which are now in their very fullest bloom), the other to climb up and seat herself upon the wall dividing the grounds from the public road, and the sight of the passers-by.

"Tell me what you see, Queenie," murmurs Bee, the one lying on the turf.

"You should come up and see for yourself—a sight worth seeing, you may be sure," I answer.

"Oh, I couldn't make the effort," goes on Bee, who is just one of those who are too sweet for sunshine, and therefore must needs court shadow all her life long.

"Bees ought never to be lazy," I say. "Now I, with my stupid, careless name, may do just as I will. Some people hold that names ought to agree with their owners; but that's a gross mistake in our case, I am sure."

"Yes; but then people can't tell what their babies will be when they grow up—"

"No, which shows that they ought to wait till—oh! there's that wedding-party on their way to the station. I have been waiting to see them; in fact, that's the reason I climbed up here, and bang goes an old slipper after them, which I have kept hidden away beneath my dress for this last hour. "I do so love weddings—don't you, Bee?" I say.

"Yes, I like to see them, and to listen to the bells. I think I like the bells best, though," and Bee closes her eyes and smiles softly to herself as a joyous "clatter, clash, ding, dong," again falls upon our listening ears.

It is useless to try to talk till the bells have ceased, which they do when the train bearing the happy couple is well out of the station, by which time I am ready to take up my word again. "I like everything belonging to weddings—the cake, the dresses,

and the fun ; and I think, too, I should like going away afterwards—I like change."

"But then life wouldn't be always change, even if one were married. Some married people's lives are very quiet, and—"

"Humdrum," I suggest. "Well, but I don't mean that. I mean I like weddings. I was at Cousin Clara's last summer, and it made me say that I'd like either to go to a wedding or be married myself every day in the year."

"I've never been to a wedding ; but I've read about them," says quiet Bee.

"Oh, but reading is nothing compared with the reality. Bee, I've never told you, I'm sure I don't know why, only—you see, mamma said I'd better not chatter about it at school. However, school-days will be over soon, now, and it can't matter a bit ; but—I'm going to be married!"

Bee lifts her dainty head off the grass, to gaze adoringly upward. She says never a word, only now that the secret is out, I do not mind chattering to my heart's content of my cousin Claude, who is to be the happy man. He is my father's nephew, the son of his dead elder brother ; and as we two are the only children of both, it was agreed, in fact made a clause of the dead man's will, that we should marry, and so join the two families into one. I don't quite know how rich either of us is in reality, but I know that then we shall be very, very wealthy, and I tell Bee so, not without, I fear, a little of pride in both my look and tone.

"And what is Claude like?"

"I can't say exactly. I haven't seen him these three years, through his having been so much abroad. But—why you saw him once, Bee, for yourself. Then, if you remember, he was tall and fair, but now he may be short and dark, for all I know : you see people alter so with going abroad."

"He may be brown," laughs Bee, "but he can't be short. Yes, I remember him ; but I didn't know then that he was to—marry you."

"He is, though ; and, Bee, I've decided on the dress."

"Well, what is it to be ?"

"Swansdown, with bits of shining stuff over it like ice. All the bridesmaids shall wear the same, with swansdown caps to match, like the 'Snow Queen' I read of somewhere."

"You would have to wear orange blossoms yourself, though ; and as to the dresses—you see, the 'Snow Queen' wore hers at a New Year's party, and you may be married in the summer time," says matter-of-fact Bee.

"Oh, yes, I may. It may be directly

Claude comes home, which will be at the end of the next month."

Another peal of the bells, after the another pause, and now I am talking again "Of course, you'll be a bridesmaid, Bee Oh, but, Bee, I forgot ! I once read of double wedding. Two sisters married on the same day. It sounds pretty, doesn't 'double wedding,' and as I haven't a sister, I should like you to take her place."

"I don't think I shall ever be married," sighs Bee.

"Then what do you mean to do ?"

"I don't know yet—help mamma with the little ones, I suppose, when I get home. There are other things in life, Queenie, besides falling in love and getting married."

"Yes, writing poetry for instance ; but I must say I'd as soon darn stockings as that. Still, perhaps you don't believe in love and being happy ?"

"Yes, I do believe in both ; and, dear, I couldn't write poetry if I tried. I may love, too, in my way"—the confession is softly made. "No life can be perfect without love ; but I think that I shall never marry."

"Love in your own way ! and what may be your way, Madam Bee ?" I can't help asking her, and yet her reply vexes me just a little.

"Excuse me, dear, but if I loved I could never let it be known. I mean, I could not talk of it, and I would keep it to myself."

"But one must know of it, Bee, else—but I do not understand you."

"I mean," and Bee murmurs to the flowers above her head rather than to me—"that I might chance to love some one who did not care for me, and then I would never let it be known. He may perhaps love some one else ; and even if he loved me, his own love must tell him of mine, for love cannot be love, to my way of thinking, which declares itself."

"On one side, you mean ?"

"Yes, on one side."

"Ah, well, I love Claude, and shall love him more when I see him—I know I shall ; and Claude will love me, of course—you know, Bee, you said yourself that no one could resist the 'Queen of Hearts,' and so Claude must love me."

"Young ladies, what are you doing ?" and the English teacher breaks in upon us before we are aware. "My dears," as I scramble down from the wall, and Bee rises and gives herself a gentle shake, before following her back to the "play-ground proper"—"you should remember the rules, even though it is the last day."

And so vanish all our dreams, for the time at least, and now we are chatting with the rest, giving good-bye thoughts to one and another, longing all the time for the morrow to come and end it all, beginning for Bee, as well as myself, a glad new life and the joys of home.

\* \* \*

It is morning now, and Weymouth is unusually gay, for the weather has been, and still is, all that can be desired. The band is playing, the sea is dazzlingly blue, and around us is all the pleasant bustle of a seaside place. The bathing-machines are out a goodly distance from the shore, for the morning is still, and the sea like to a lamb for gentleness. Idlers sit upon the benches, others pace to and fro; while upon the sands many are sitting, either too lazy to do anything but enjoy everything, or playing at reading or sewing, as the case may be. I am too honest to play at either, too restless to utterly enjoy, for I am looking for Claude. Here he comes, but he does not see me, and now he leans against a lamp-post and just gazes far away over to the harbour, where the white sails of many yachts shine up in the morning sunlight. He loves his own yacht, the "Queen Bee"—his eyes are tender as he takes her in; but he looks at me very tenderly too, when going up to him I put my hand upon his arm.

"I am almost tired of waiting," I say, and I am half cross to think he is smiling, instead of making apologies.

"And I had forgotten that you were waiting. There, is not that a confession to make to a lady?"

"Oh, it is like men's confessions generally."

"You having had large experience that way?" and he pats my cheek, as he turns again to look at his yacht. "She's a beauty, isn't she, Queenie?"

"I don't know."

"You are not jealous of her, Queenie—my little trim 'Queen Bee'? But there, when we've all taken the next cruise together, I expect you'll love her as well as I."

"But, Claude, I don't care much for going. Won't it be dreadfully lonely?"

"Lonely! no; not if you provide yourself with needlework and books to pass the time away. Of course there won't be crowds of people, and bands playing," and he again pats my cheek; "but there will be your father and mother, and myself, besides old Dan'l, who plays something, I hardly know what, only that it seems very romantic, I assure you, out at sea."

"But, Claude—" I have no time to say more, for now he is darting away with his

utmost speed towards the pier, though why I know no more than you. A moment, and other folks are hurrying likewise the same way, casting wild looks out seaward as they hasten by—one, two, three policemen race off as for life; and now I move on with the rest, for after all, what can I do, or how can I help it? The excitement still continues, and yet I gather nothing of the cause, till an elderly lady coming towards me stands still to recover her veil, which some jostling passers-by have caused to slip well nigh off the wonderful head-gear in which apparently her soul delights.

I step forward—"There, it is all right now," and I put the gossamer into its proper place. The lady smiles her thanks, poor old soul! and now I ask, just by way of saying something pleasant, if she can tell me what the people are running to see.

"A man, my dear—a drowning man, nothing more. He was swimming, they say, and was seized with cramp, which must be bad; but then—" I wait for no more—one I see now, who must be Claude, in the water near the pier, battling with the waves which are beginning to come in. My heart almost ceases to beat, and then throbs wildly again, as till now I have never known it do. I cannot stand still, I must hurry on to the pier, anywhere rather than watch that floating figure—not but what Claude can do it—I mean, swim the distance and save the man. Yes, now he is bringing him back, and there is a cry that the other man is not altogether helpless, but that he can cling, as swimmers know how, to the one who is saving him, although apparently the numbness is on him still, so that alone he could do nothing—nothing. They reach a machine; but it has been a long and weary swim, for the one who was drowning seems to have floated a long way out, ere the cramp, or fear, or whatever it was, obliged him to desist, and being exhausted, he had sunk more than once, for sheer inability to keep up and make an effort.

Yes, they are both safe, the crowd say, and I am glad, I, the only one I think, amid the whole crowd of people to whom Claude is anything but a man who has risked his life for another. I envy the old boatman standing away close to the water's edge, for he holds Claude's clothes, at least, that portion of them which he threw off before his hasty plunge into the water. I do not see Claude land, I only see him when he is putting on his coat, coolly, quietly, as though no great deed had been done; as though people were not ready to carry him off bodily, in a sort of triumphal car made up of men's shoulders

alone, to any place to which he desires to go. Seeing his coolness, however, the crowd disperses, and now I tread softly to his side and take his hand in mine, almost before he knows I am here.

"Ah, Queenie! I owe you an apology for leaving you as I did," and now hand-in-hand we walk away in the direction of the "Royal," which for the time being is Claude's place of abode.

"You were brave, very brave, Claude," I say, under my breath. "Now you must make haste and put on some dry things."

"Oh, salt-water never hurts," and Claude laughs, although little streams of moisture drip from him even as he walks. "It is lucky, though, I practised swimming with my clothes on, for it was a long pull, and they keep one down if one is a bit spent. No, Queenie," for I am still leading him on, "I mean to wait here and see the fellow I fished up—his machine, I see, is just coming in."

And here he stands, his fair face looking fairer than ever, owing to his being paler than his wont, for, as one can see, he is a trifle exhausted with his great exertion. I think, too, that he is shivering, still, I cannot be sure; but here comes the other man, and Claude advances hastily to meet him, as though already a sort of love has sprung up between them. They grasp each other's hands in silence, a moment they gaze into each other's countenance, then the stranger murmurs beneath his breath, yet deeply and heartily withal—

"I owe my life to you."

"Never mind," and Claude does not deny the debt; he but puts it on one side so gracefully that you love him for it all the more. "Any man would have done the same, if he could."

"Any man could not have helped me so. I was foolish to drift on, but I couldn't turn, and when I sank the last time I thought it was all over."

But again the shiver comes, and I urge Claude to hurry in; the other man, too, who seems all right, saving for a pallor upon his lip and cheek, and an excited sort of gratitude in his every look and word, now entreats him likewise, so that we all turn and walk together towards the hotel. The stranger introduces himself as Edward Graeme, and Claude mentions me to him as his cousin, and I blush as I think of the other title which will be mine by-and-by—sweetheart at first, and Claude's wife, as a crowning point to it all.

Well, they leave me at the crossing, and walking on, down to the sands, I take up my old position and think and think of

this and that, in a dreamy sort of way, because of the intensity of the heat; and as I think, my eyes rove, whether they will or no, over to the yacht, with the white sails shining up so clearly in the harbour.

## CHAPTER II.

IT is afternoon, and the tide is out—I, Queenie Churchill, am once again upon the shore. A book lies upon the sands close by, but I cannot read: instead I close my eyes, and go on still with my happy, hopeful dreams, till the sound of an approaching footstep arouses me. I hurry to sit upright, for it is Edward Graeme, the stranger of the morning, who now stands before me.

"Miss Churchill, you are taking things easy," and he smiles upon me, as one would smile upon a child.

"Yes, of course; and it appears, too, that you are not above doing the same," as he sinks down upon the sands a little distance off.

"Well, I've earned my rest—with you young ladies it is different."

"Much you know about young ladies. If only you had been at Bury House you would talk differently."

"I am sure I wish I had been there, supposing it were really a desirable place; but what and where is Bury House?"

"As to the *what*, to you it would be a house of correction, though I found it only a lady's seminary. Where is it? Why somewhere on the Surrey side of London; and I assure you, the very air of the place cures one of all visionary ideas of young ladyisms and laziness; directly you inhale it you feel its power, and that you must work or starve."

"Well, to be sure," and Mr. Graeme-yawns, "it is the first time I have heard of such an institution. Let me see, Bury House you call it—I think I must try to get it an honourable mention, as one of the seven wonders."

"Oh, you needn't scoff. I assure you I did work there; and if I haven't earned a rest, at least I know some others who are just as bad."

"Miss Churchill, I am the bearer of a message to you. Your cousin says (supposing Mrs. Churchill returns in time) that he wants to have the yacht in readiness, and leave here in a few days. He bade me say also that if not objectionable to yourself, a lady-friend could be made very comfortable, only he leaves it entirely to you to name whom it shall be."

"There's Bee," I say thoughtfully. "Yes, Bee Thring would do nicely; and

I think if I wrote she would come—at any rate I'll see about it this evening."

"Then that's settled, so far; and now, provided all goes well, I believe we shall have a pleasant time."

"Are you going with us, Mr. Graeme?" I open my eyes widely, I know, for I am surprised.

"Yes; I believe I'm to be first mate, or something equal to it. I love the sea, Miss Churchill, don't you?"

"No—that is, not to be on it; but perhaps I shall feel better if I have Bee."

"I'm sure I hope you will, and—that you will have cause never to regret, the—pshaw, though! what am I saying? There are never any regrets in such a sunny lot as yours," and he rises to his feet, and having said "Adieu," leaves me to myself again, when taking up my book I feel a sudden interest in the tale, and read on, and on, till the sky is bluer than ever, and the sun's rays begin to slant and cast ruddy lights upon the cliffs and the water too.

I think I will go in now, so I saunter across the street to the house which papa has taken for the season of a friend who prefers to spend this summer-time in France. I don't feel very lively here, though, for mamma is away and papa no company at all. At the first, we thought of inviting a whole host of friends to spend this seaside season with us; but, then Claude wrote, saying that he should put in at Weymouth about the time of our reaching here, and, somehow, I felt that I would rather meet him alone. And now I have met him; but I don't think he cares much for me, and I am wondering—but now I will not be false, for I do care for him, I think, only love does not seem to be half what I thought it when Claude was not here, and when I dreamt such foolish dreams about him.

I am thinking in this strain when I enter the drawing-room, which is dim compared with the outside world, for the blinds are half-drawn, and the lace curtains are draped, so as to protect the carpet from the sun. I walk across to the sofa, meaning to lay my hat there; but—not on Claude's legs, and I give a little start as I perceive him lying upon it at full length.

"Claude! are you ill?" and I peer down into his face, because the room is partly dark.

"Ill! no; why should I be? I've been down to the yacht, though, and am rather tired. I tell you what, Queenie, you are a bad manager, for here have I been waiting, don't know how long, for you to come and give me a cup of tea."

"Well, I will give it you now," and I hurry away to where tea is laid, and the urn hissing beautifully, just as it ought.

Now I have brewed tea, and called papa, and now I ask Claude whether I do not deserve praise for having been so quick.

"Well, yes, you have hurried up a bit, but even in that you are wrong: a woman should never be in a bustle, it doesn't look graceful."

"But then I'm not a woman yet—when I am, I mean to have all the dignity of mamma and grandmamma combined."

Papa has not come in, but I give Claude his tea, and altogether I think it nice to wait upon him and make him comfortable.

"Queenie, did Graeme deliver my message?"

"Yes; and I mean to ask Bee—you remember Bee?"

"Of course I do. Queenie, you know Graeme is going too, I suppose? I can hardly account for it, but somehow I feel drawn to him. I feel as though he and I must be friends."

"That is because he owes you a debt of gratitude," I reply. "It is just as I used to feel towards the little girls at Bury House when I'd helped them with their lessons. But, Claude, it will be better having Bee, for I think I should not have liked it much else."

"Come, I shall be jealous, little lady, if you say any more. Perhaps it isn't altogether Bee's company which is reconciling you to it. Am I right?"

"You know you are not," and I run away in pretended indignation.

Well, I write to Bee, and now to-day, instead of a reply, comes Bee herself with mamma, who chanced to be spending the night at Mr. Thring's, on her way home, so that upon the receipt of my letter, what should they both do but start to travel down together. Mamma's real purpose in going to town was to engage a new maid, her old one having left her under circumstances anything but pleasant. She has gone this time to make personal inquiry, and to see the lady, who has sent a written recommendation, as to character, &c. Everything seems all right, though, and mamma is pleased, for the girl has a taking look, and is, moreover, a foreigner. She says she is French, but looks more as though Italian blood flows in her veins; her name, too, is strange, and hardly pronounceable: therefore, mamma says we are to call her by her Christian name, which is Louise.

Late this evening she comes to Bee and me as we sit together talking, asking if she can do anything for us, but we tell her no,

for at Bury House we were independent of maids, and so we can be here. But this maid is strange in both look and ways, and after she is gone the expression of her eyes haunt me, though I still go on talking to Bee, telling her of Claude's adventure with Mr. Graeme, and, as you may rest satisfied, the story loses nothing at all in the telling.

"It was brave and good," she murmurs at its close. "And Claude himself, Queenie, is he what you expected him to be? I mean in face and figure. Is he fair and tall as you remembered him?"

"Yes, but, Bee, you will see him to-morrow, and then you can judge for yourself. I hope you will like him," with which fervent wish I yawn, for the hour is late.

"We had better say good-night," and as Bee rises, her fair hair falls about her almost to the floor. "I almost wish I had asked Louise to brush it," she goes on, "for I feel very tired now."

"Let me be your maid," and I dart forward, brush in hand; but with a warm kiss Bee puts me aside, and with another good-night, and a wish for a lovely day to-morrow, we part, Bee's room being next mine, so that she has not many steps to go.

This morning, I awake to find Louise standing by my side studying my face, as it seems, although the look of intentness in her eyes is now gradually fading away. She says that as mamma will not rise for another hour, she has come, thinking to be of service to me; but I propose that she shall go to Bee instead.

"I have attended to Miss Thring," is her calm reply. "I brushed her hair last night and again this morning. Now, if you please, I will serve you. You were asleep awhile back, or I would have attended to you first, miss"—this last apologetically.

"Oh, it doesn't matter, for I am sleepy still," and I yawn. "How came you to brush Miss Thring's hair last night, though? I thought you had gone to bed, for it was late when she left me."

"Seeing the quantity of hair Miss Thring has, I waited for her, thinking she would like me to do it. I like Miss Thring." All this she says with the easy familiarity of a foreigner—a familiarity which is not offensive because of the cool calmness with which the words are spoken.

We are out upon the sands now, Bee wearing a white cambric dress, with pale pink bows, which suits her so admirably that I am proud of her. She is descanting on Louise's usefulness and obliging ways, which appear to have taken her by storm, when Claude makes his appearance with

Mr. Graeme at his side, and so we all meet. We stroll up and down the sands together, talking and laughing, oh, so lightly, and so gaily! till at last the tide turning, the waves, as they rush in all sparkling and bright, seem to laugh too, in a never-ending chorus which floats far, far away, further than the eye can see. I walk with Mr. Graeme, and Bee with Claude, for which I am glad, seeing that she knows him the best; but we all four talk together as we will, till presently turning to me, Claude asks abruptly—

"Queenie, who is that woman yonder? She has gone now, and down your area steps too, but she was watching us intently when first I spoke. I am sure I have seen her before, else I have dreamt of her."

"It must be Louise, our new maid," I say. "I saw her out by the pier a little time ago. Had she a small basket in her hand?"

"I am sure I cannot say—the girl herself was sufficient for me without the basket. She is striking, though, and no mistake."

"It was Louise," put in Bee, after which we continue our promenade as before.

\* \* \* \*

We are aboard the yacht now: it is past mid-day, and mamma is below resting, for she cannot bear the glare of the sun as Bee and I can. We are leaning back amid a whole host of cushions, and are exceedingly comfortable, for there is an awning over our heads, and we have our books to amuse us. Papa, Mr. Graeme, and Claude are sitting opposite in the forecastle, smoking; they appear comfortable enough, but Claude looks pale, and I notice that while the others indulge in cold grog he is drinking iced champagne. Bee seems to be reading, but of course I am not really, else I should not be able to watch Claude; and now I dreamily close my eyes, and I suppose that I presently fall asleep. Soon, however, I start and awake with a queer feeling—a feeling as though I were being watched. I glance at Bee, then at the other three—Edward Graeme is looking my way, and I wonder, a little angrily, whether or not I chanced to have kept my mouth open while I slept. I take up my book again and begin to read, when with the side-glands which so often deceives one, and seems to take in the shadow of a figure in the gangway, I turn—there is no one, nevertheless I keep my eye upon the place pretty persistently, for I am always afraid of dark corners, nor does the fear leave me even here aboard the yacht, where I am never alone.

Presently Louise comes with a message

from mamma. "Will we have tea here where we are, or will we go below?"

"Go below," we say, glancing at the same time towards the others, who are still smoking.

"Mr. Churchill—Mr. Claude, I mean, looks pale," Louise goes on to say.

"Yes," I reply. "Mamma is of opinion that he took cold the other day."

"Likely enough, miss. I have heard say that it is bad to keep wet clothing on," and Louise's voice sounds as sympathetic as a servant's voice can be.

When she has gone, we saunter across and tell the rest; papa and Mr. Graeme go with us: Claude says he will rather remain where he is, and therefore we leave him to himself. We drink our tea, and I feel refreshed; but as the others are talking, I pour out a strong cup for Claude, and asking Bee to take my place at the table, I steal away with it, for I feel sure that this will do him good. His face brightens as I come in sight; and as I sit down by his side, he declares that I must taste his champagne; therefore he opens a new bottle and pours out the sparkling draught, which I taste and then hold in my hand, since I do not care for it at all, except that he has given it me.

"Well, I have drunk the tea," he says, "and you have the champagne still. Don't you like it, little woman?"

"No," and now he has taken it from my hand.

"The last was not good, I thought," and he tastes mine as though to test it. "This is first-rate, though, Queenie; either it is better than the other, else it is the better for the touch of your lips. Let me give you some more."

"No, no—indeed, I would rather not," and I take his outstretched hand as though to stay it. And so, with his hand in mine, we sit on, he telling incidents of his three years' travel, which interest me not a little. Presently he relapses into silence, and I disturb him not, for his head is leaning upon his other hand, either as though it aches or as though he were in deep thought, therefore I think it best to keep quiet.

"I have been wondering," he is speaking at last, "where it is I have seen your Louise, previous to her coming to you. Now I think I have solved the mystery. In a cemetery belonging to a small church, in one of the West Indian islands, I once came upon a woman amongst the graves, who was as like to her as possible, saving for her age. They may, however, be mother and daughter. Indeed, I should rather say they were, for the

appearance of both is striking in the extreme."

"She has lived abroad. Lady Armitage told mamma that she took her from some planter's widow, who could not afford to keep her—yes, and she was in the Indies once, I know, for Lord Armitage had property there till within the last year or so."

"Well, that settles the point," and Claude seems as though a great weight were removed from his mind. "Queenie"—he has withdrawn his hand from mine, and is now stroking my hair—"how old are you?"

"I was seventeen a month ago."

"I wonder, dear"—this hesitatingly, and looking fixedly into my eyes—"whether you are old enough to be reminded of my father's dying wish—nay, more, his dying command."

"Yes," I murmur the word scarce above my breath, nevertheless Claude hears it.

"I am older than you, dear, and I have never—had a real love yet, never spoken one word to any woman or girl which could in anywise be considered as a slight to that dying will. Still, you may have done so, young as you are, for even children fall in love sometimes. Tell me honestly, Queenie, if you ever have?"

"No, never." My face, which I know was red before, is white now, and I tremble all over, though I know not why.

"Would you rather, Queenie, that I waited a little longer—till your next birthday, for instance, when you will feel older?" His arm has stolen about me now, as though to keep me from trembling.

"No—go on, please." And "go on" he does.

"Queenie, I myself think that it is high time our minds were settled upon this point. It prevents mistakes, dear, and keeps our affections from wandering. There is nothing, I think, which makes either a man or woman (though, as yet, you are scarcely that) so strong as having a fixed purpose or plan, and then standing true to it, come what may."

I wonder why he talks like this? As though—I could even think of anybody else! as though I wouldn't rather be married to him than to anybody!

"You are not frightened, dear? No! Well, then, suppose you and I begin to think of ourselves as engaged? and suppose, little woman, you begin to think of being some time married, and of having a husband and a house to govern, just whenever you like to say the word? It all sounds strange to you, I dare say"—and he holds me very tightly now—"it sounds strange to myself; but, Queenie, I am very fond of you, and if only you are half as

## LOVE, THE CONQUEROR.

fond of me, dear, it will, I am sure, be all right in the end."

"Half as fond!" Oh, Claude, I do not think I can ever love you more than I do now; and so I give him my face to kiss, yes, and I kiss back again, proud and happy, because of his words, that he is very fond of me.

Bee is coming now. She does not see Claude withdraw his arm, does not guess of what we have been talking; and as Mr. Graeme and papa take to pacing the deck together, we three sit in the cool, sweet evening glamour.

I wonder if Bee knows? but of course she does, everybody must see that something unusual has taken place, and that I am feeling like the "little old woman," scarcely sure whether "I be I" or somebody else. Bee takes no notice, of course not; and Claude seems much as usual, only I hear a different tone in his voice, as he goes on talking of this and that. It seems a pleasant break, though, when Dan'l comes upon the scene, and Claude calls out that, as he has nothing much to do, he may as well bring his big brass instrument and play for us. Readily enough the old man obeys, and as Claude has said, the music is very romantic, out here upon the green waters, where it wafts and wafts away on all sides at once. Yes, the waters are green now; and I idly watch them till Dan'l stops, for he cannot play long, seeing that it is very trying to the breath. Instead he is now telling a story of what happened to him in the South Seas, when he and his comrades caught a glimpse of the sea-serpent, towering high and terrible into the air. He describes the thing with awful distinctness; and now I am frightened as I look down into the vast, watery deep, for, as the waves ripple and wind, they seem to me as serpents intertwining—serpents who presently will stretch up their green arms and draw me down, down, curling and wreathing about me in their cold sliminess, as—only Dan'l's sea-serpents could.

"Sing for us, dear," whispers Claude; but I shake my head—I cannot sing tonight.

Dan'l has stopped his story-telling, and now Bee speaks out. "I will sing, if you like," and forthwith she gives us "Barbara Allen," "Annie Laurie," and "Ye Banks and Braes," for, as she says, she knows nothing new, and really these old lays sound the best, I think, with Dan'l's monotone ever and anon helping them to waft and swell.

At the close of the last-named song, however, Bee rises hastily to join mamma, who has just come up, and now both to-

gether they lean over the bulwark, looking at the waters. I can see Bee's face well, so sweet, so fair, and so *spirituelle*, as shown in the pale light of the moon which is just rising.

Claude takes my hand and presses it within his own; and now he talks to me softly. There is nothing really in what he says, only it seems right to us both that we should lower our voices, while all the time old *Dan'l* plays at intervals, giving, as it were, a double charm to this our little world. And the moon rises and rises, till, daylight vanquished at last, it alone reigns supremely, gloriously in the heavens. It is now, too, that Claude, taking advantage of everybody else being engaged with the splendour of the night, bending low, touches my forehead with his lips, whispering that come what may I must ever be true to him so long as we both shall live. It makes me thrill, the dear touch and the words, and the remote idea of life's closing scene; but *Dan'l* is speaking, and his words dispel the sweet sadness—no, not sadness, and yet they are very alike—sadness and the tender bliss which is now upon me, and which pervades my spirit through and through.

"It be a onlucky night for the beginnin' o' anythin'," he says. "Onlucky for goin' out or comin' in; onlucky for births, weddin's, or love-makin'."

"Don't be ill-natured, *Dan'l*," quothes Claude, his hand still lying lightly upon my shoulder.

"I bean't, Cap'n, I bean't! 'Tis nought my doin' or sayin'; but there's bad luck for all the moon shines on to-night. Don't ee see the waver o' the light or the greenish colour it gies to the water? Them's bad signs o' a bad endin' for all as is begun to-night—vilent death and suicide ha' been know'd to come o' it, though from both o' it and all that's ill, I say 'the saints defend us!'"

Louise now brings some slight refreshment by way of supper; and I notice that she glances more than once at Claude and me. I am sure she sees how matters are, and somehow the glance of her keen black eyes troubles me more than *Dan'l*'s prophecy, inasmuch as I cannot shake it off or dispel the feeling which it arouses.

We all seem in the best of spirits, but I am doubtful, as I never have been before, as to how the others feel in reality. I know that I could cry, whereas I am laughing; and I wonder, oh, I wonder, if other people also disguise their true selves and appear other than they really are, as I am doing now. But no, they cannot; everybody here is happy save myself, and I—well, I am

happy too, for Claude is here, and I am already thinking of the swansdown dress, for I dare say we shall be married in winter time, that is, if I will to have it so.

The night is quiet and still ; and now Bee, in crossing to where I stand, actually waltzes her way along—Bee, who is usually so quiet as to be almost foolishly shy. Her face is flushed, and her eyes have a strange look, as she says, almost eagerly, I think, “Queenie, couldn’t we have a dance ? It would cheer us all up, and—be something to remember afterwards ?”

Claude catches at the idea before I have time to think, as I do, that I shall always remember without this gay dance in which we are now engaged—always, yes, I should think so ; but Claude is stopping ; he feels ill and faint, he says ; his face is icy cold and white, for when he sits down I put my arms about him and press my cheek to his, as one who has the right. And who dares to question that right ? Not Bee ! And yet she pauses, too, and all the wild colour flying from her face, stands and looks calmly, as though she would read our very hearts. Louise comes up and asks what she can do ; but mamma is here, and Claude is better—better, though ghastly pale, and Louise, as she lingers, looks troubled and anxious as she catches my eye. Bee is very white, as, turning away, she walks with Mr. Graeme to the other end of the deck, deep in conversation, as it seems, and from which no one disturbs them, till by-and-by Bee leaves her companion to retire for the night.

### CHAPTER III.

**W**E are in the Bay of Naples now, and everything is charming, while the sea is of an intenser blue than I have ever so much as dreamt of before. Papa and Mr. Graeme are gone ashore. Claude is with us ; but I expect we shall all go ashore to-morrow. To-day, however, I am glad to remain quietly here, for Claude is still anything but well.

Bee is fanning his face, and repeating Tennyson by bits and scraps ; just at this moment she is on with the “Lotus Eaters,” while I am feeding him with delicious black grapes, which papa bought this morning of the people who came out to us in boats, selling all sorts of useful as well as ornamental productions of their land and skill.

Bee ceases her recitation, and Claude, looking up, closes his lips against the grape I am about to pop in. “No, Queenie, no more, thank you,” he says.

“Do you know I half think that the invalid fare in which I indulge does not suit me. I must shake the feeling off, and make myself believe I can eat and drink like other people. Dainties are lotus flowers in disguise, the more I take of them the more inert I am.”

“You’ll eat the grapes, though ?” It is childish, I know, but I rather like feeding him.

“No ; they are best for babies, Queenie, such babies as you and Bee.” Bee colours a little, and now Claude is declaring that we shall finish the grapes, for that he will not. “I think I could drink some nice cool ale,” he says, and almost before the words are spoken Bee is away to fetch it, returning with a tankard brimming full, which she says Louise has drawn for her. Claude drinks it slowly, sipping it as though he likes it.

I have finished the grapes, for Bee would have none, and has actually left us to ourselves ; and now I am watching Claude and the waves alternately. I have not overcome as yet my fear of the latter : far away, where they look blue, they are not so bad, but here, close by the vessel’s side, where they look green with a mixture of dirty-white froth which makes them seem still more terrible, I think they are like to hungry, cruel monsters—sea-serpents, or something worse, cold, slimy reptiles waiting for their prey—and I shudder as I gaze. Thus it is, I suppose, that I take to watching the sea and neglecting Claude altogether.

Bee, I know, is standing opposite, bending over the side of the yacht, and looking down, as though peering for land below the water. I am thinking of Dan’s words, of Claude’s, and of my love, but ever with the green waves writhing and wrestling amid it all. Suddenly there comes a shriek, a splash, and looking round I see no Bee, while Claude is starting up, as though but half aroused from his sleepy stupor.

“Bee ! Bee ! Save her !” I cry, and his coat off, Claude throws himself into the water, obeying my command and his own instinct as well. Dan comes up, and the lad who helps in the working of the “Queen Bee ;” and we all look eagerly over to see what is taking place, and whether or not there is danger for the two—at least, I mean, whether it seems possible for Claude to save himself and poor dear Bee. Mamma and Louise are gone with papa—there is no other help near ; and oh, it is so fearful ! for Bee has sunk twice. To be sure Claude has caught her now, but then he is exhausted—I can see it ! It is as though he were in a dream, as though he were

desiring to do something, while yet his energies are numbed, and he cannot—oh, he cannot do it!

I cry aloud to Dan'l, but already he is fastening a rope about his waist, which we all help in tying to the yacht. I blister my hands in pulling so as to get it tight and safe; but I am glad to do something; and now Dan'l is down among the waves too, and I wonder and wonder what he can do, since there are but Jim and I to pull him up. If he saves only one *first*, the other one left behind must perish, I believe, and—I do not know which of the two I can spare.

"Oh, Claude! oh, Bee!" I cry, and I wring my hands in very agony; and in my terror and affliction I do not see a boat nearing us—no, not till Edward Graeme is likewise battling with the waves, and I hear papa's voice shouting to Dan'l to hold Bee safely, while Edward secures Claude, and he and the boatmen bring the boat round, so that they can all be taken in. Ah, but I am so glad that I lose sight of everything and everybody. I hear the sea and that is all. Surely I am not overboard myself! I am not drowning, am I? And now when it seems long, long ago that it all happened, I open my eyes to find myself below deck and lying in my berth, and Louise bending over me, with, as I fancy, tears in her eyes.

"He is not *dead*? Oh, Louise, say that he is not!" for I can think of no other reason why she should weep.

"No, no, Miss Mary; they are both safe!" and now fairly lifting me in her arms, she says that I must go up into the light and air, since that alone will serve to set me right.

"I did not fall over, did I?" It is a foolish question to ask, seeing that my clothes are quite dry, but Louise only gives me an extra hug and laughs at it. "You fainted, Miss Mary, that was all."

She carries me through the State-room, where I catch sight of Bee lying upon the floor with cushions under her head. Mamma is kneeling close by, while papa looks on as though he were the doctor, which he is not. Mamma raises her eyes, and papa turns to look at me in passing; but Louise hurries me on, and now that I am standing on my feet, she leads me up the steps to the awning, where Bee and I have so often sat and read. I ask to be allowed to go over to Claude, and I find him in dry garments, leaning back in his old seat, but sleeping heavily, while an old sail has been so contrived that it shields him almost entirely from the light and heat of the declining sun.

"Why is he asleep?" I question of Mr. Graeme, who, sitting opposite, seems to be watching Claude with keenest interest.

"He is tired out, I should say, besides which I gave him a pretty strong dose of brandy to take off the effect of the strain upon him," is his reply.

Louise glances quickly around, and I, doing the same, note a half-bottle of brandy which, from its position, must be that from which the dose was taken. "Sleep hurts nobody," she observes, and Mr. Graeme nodding assent, she leads me away, taking care so to arrange my cushions that the breeze shall blow directly upon me, for which, when I feel how refreshing it is, I thank her.

Now I am alone—alone to watch Claude, which I do incessantly. He does not stir in the least, does not move—only leans still in the same place and sleeps, almost as though he were dead.

Presently Mr. Graeme comes over, and takes up Bee's position by my side. "Are you feeling better?" he asks, and I tell him: "Yes," looking all the while at Claude, and wishing he would wake up.

"I don't wonder that you were frightened," he goes on. "It would have been a sad affair if we had not been near. How did it all come about?"

I tell him what I know, and then I am surprised to see Louise come again from below, and approaching the sleeper, stoop as though to gaze anxiously into his face. Mr. Graeme goes over to her as she stands. Something she says to him in a low voice, then Mr. Graeme touches Claude's hand, after which he moves the sleeper's head slightly, and again resumes his old post of watching him as before.

Louise now comes to me. "You are better, Miss Mary?" she says, her eyes wandering from me to Claude even as she speaks.

"Yes. Is anything the matter with Mr. Claude, Louise?" I ask, and in return she answers my question with another.

"Miss Mary, you are fond of Mr. Claude?"

I am half inclined to be angry, nevertheless I reply, "He is my cousin."

"Yes," but she means more, I can see. "You care for him more than yourself?"

"I—I do not see why you should ask. You are impertinent, Louise."

"Never mind—I mean—pardon, Miss Mary," and I cannot be angry with her, for the dewy softness of her strange black eyes disarms me. "Miss Mary, he ought not to sleep so long. You must wake him."

I spring up, ready to obey at once, for my

heart tells me she is right, and that he really ought to be awakened.

"Stay, you must have cold water and bathe his head and face; you must likewise bathe his hands well when he awakes—in fact, do all you can to refresh and arouse him; to me his sleep is nothing more than a sort of stupor which may mean danger."

I think of his inertia for days past, of his drowsiness this very afternoon, his seemingly sleeping energy; and now the one word *danger* literally burns itself into my brain. "You think he will be all right presently, Louise?" But she is gone, and now I am telling Edward Graeme what she has said, and begging him to help me—to do what? Why, to save Claude!

Louise recommends a more recumbent position, and presently we are bathing head, face, and hands with trembling earnestness. I am frightened, for all Edward Graeme's kindly assurance that I need not be; for I am thinking, "What if Claude should sleep his very life away?" Still, it cannot be, when I have thought so much—so much of being happy with him.

A sigh escapes him, and his eyelids quiver; still we go on deluging him with iced water. Now he is gazing at me and about him, but till I smile into his dear eyes he does not know who I am: he does now, though, for he whispers, scarce above his breath, "Poor little Queenie!"

"I am glad you are better!" I cry. "Oh, Claude, I feared you would never wake up again!"

"Ah, I fainted, I suppose. Is Bee all right?" and a remembrance of the past is, I see, dawning upon him.

"Yes, she is safe, and getting better fast," and I wipe Claude's face dry. He is looking almost himself now, and Louise brings him some strong tea, which he drinks with feverish haste, after which we three pace the deck together, Claude seemingly deriving fresh strength even as the breezes blow upon him.

Later on I go down to see how Bee is, and I find her also asleep, which mamma says is good for her. I look round at Louise, who is close by, and she smiles that all is right; therefore we enjoy our tea, and the lazy evening time which succeeds it, when we all walk gladly yet softly in a way which does not at all break the grateful stillness which prevails—grateful in that we feel unutterably thankful for the mercy vouchsafed in rendering us thus an unbroken party, although, as we solemnly remember, death has been so near.

It is evening now, and dusky shadows are on the water, interspersed with faint

glimmerings of moonlight here and there; for the sky being somewhat cloudy, the rising moon has not as yet a fair chance to shine upon us as it otherwise would. I am leaning idly over the vessel's side. Of course I think of Bee, but then she must have been giddy, else she would not have fallen, and at any rate I am safe; but—a hand is laid upon my arm, and I turn quickly to find Mr. Graeme standing close by at my side.

"It is very cool and refreshing," is the commonplace to which he gives utterance, and then we stand both together watching the shadows and the pale lights as they come and go. "Claude is below trying to persuade Miss Thring that the cool air up here will do her good," he next remarks.

I glance away to where mamma sits in her light wicker chair, her book in her hand, and her reading-lamp lit, while papa lounges close by. Old Dan'l is smoking in the forecastle, and Jim is at the helm. Louise is with Bee, and Claude is there also, as Mr. Graeme has said.

"I might go and tell her how nice it is. I should be with her now, only that mamma said I should be better up here," and I turn as though to leave him.

"You need not run away," urges my companion; "and really, Miss Churchill, you always seem as though you grudged giving me a minute."

"No, I don't," and I smile, for here is Bee, with Claude close behind, and I think as I look upon her face that its delicate beauty is sweeter and fairer than ever.

"I am glad to be still alive and with you, you old darling," is her whispered greeting, as the pair of us half smother each other with kisses, and "Oh, Bee! I am so terribly glad too," is my half-tearful, half-laughing response, for indeed we neither of us seem to know whether it will be best to laugh or cry.

I link my arm in hers as we stand, but she is going to the other side of me, thus giving place to Claude; and, as I feel a little tremor run through her frame, I wonder whether it is owing to her looking down into the water again, or whether, like myself, Bee has found a love? If so, why, then, meeting with Edward Graeme was quite a romantic and a pleasant thing for us all.

But Claude's arm is about me, Claude's voice sounding in my ears, and although we talk but fun I am supremely happy, and so is Bee too, judging from the quiet glory of her face, which somehow reminds me of the glory of the moon, even as I gaze upon it.

Mamma calls Bee, and papa coming up

asks some question as to our next resting-place ; for now we are moving steadily on, leaving the Bay behind us far in the distance. Claude removes his arm, and steps behind ever so little. Presently, however, papa seizes him by the buttonhole, and, as it were, drags him away ; and now Edward Graeme and I are once more alone.

"Miss Thring appears none the worse—" he begins.

"She looks very pale," I interrupt, and glancing up I meet the full gaze of his eyes, shining dark and mysterious as the subdued light about us.

"You are looking none the better, Miss Churchill—may I say Queenie?"

"Of course you may ; and as to my appearance, why should I look better ? It doesn't add to one's health, does it, to have one's dearest friends very nearly drowned?"

"Thanks—no, of course not, Queenie," and he speaks my name gravely and without hesitation, as though I had been Queenie to him for ever and a day. "May I tell you what I think, though?—that you are tired of this trip. I can see it in your every look and gesture. It is pleasant in some ways, while yet it seems irksome in its restraints—at least, that is what I find it."

"I like it—I am enjoying it," I reply, with warmth. "I—"

"Hush, no fibs," and he lays his fingers lightly upon my lips.

I am angry. "And why should I not enjoy it?"

"That I cannot tell you ; I only know that it is not so—perhaps because of our being thrown so much upon each other for company and sympathy—because that when tired of any one thing we cannot run away and leave it for another."

"You are speaking of your own feelings, not of mine."

"Well, well, let it be so," but the way in which he yields his point irritates me more than a flat denial. "Queenie, I mean to propose our return to-morrow. Claude would really be the better for a little land exercise—a good stiff tramp, for instance, over a Scotch moor, after which rest would follow, acting like a powerful tonic upon his whole system."

"But he isn't going to Scotland ; and, besides, we all mean to stay our full time aboard the yacht."

"I am going to Scotland ; and what if I venture to say that I means *we*? You won't agree with me, I know, and yet even you yourself would be all the better for such a change."

I try to protest against it ; but he keeps

talking quietly on, as quietly and as pleasantly as though I had agreed with him, telling me of his old home in the North, which he speaks of as a castle—of its many legends, its lovely views, and the fineness of the gorse and heather, which paints, as it were, the whole scene in colours of purple and gold.

My heart warms to him a little as he goes on ; his love for his home is something so fresh, so intense ; yet when he winds up the whole with a sure and certain hope of our all accompanying him thither when we land, I cut him short.

"It is no use hoping that, Mr. Graeme. Papa dislikes Scotland, and I would say Scotchmen as well, only it would be perhaps too pointed. You will not persuade him, although, of course, Claude can please himself," and I end with a laugh to cover in a measure the rudeness of my speech. And yet there is something rising in my throat, something I do not understand, and which threatens to choke me if I do not keep it back.

"And you also share in Mr. Churchill's dislike? I think you meant to say so."

"Very well—if you will have it so, I did."

"Did what?" and he bends a little my way. I look up at him in surprise. "Did share, or did mean to tell me so—which?"

"Did mean to tell you so." My voice sounds colder than I had meant it to be ; and then he falls back a little, and takes to leaning over and looking down into the water once again. Yet he rouses himself when I would steal away to mamma and Bee, and forces himself to talk (else I fancy it) to detain me still by his side. No doubt but he is sorry for what he has said, therefore I will not go away ; besides, too, he is Claude's guest, and as such I must tolerate him and his ideas likewise.

"Have you any cause to dislike your new maid, Miss Churchill—I mean, do you trust her? Being good at toilets," and he smiles a little indulgently, as though my plain white dress embodied all the known pomps and vanities of the world, "is of course something in her favour, yet it does not, I think, add to her trustworthiness."

I pause a moment ere I reply. "She is strange," I say, "and at first I wondered at many of her ways ; but I like her for all that, and—yes, I would trust her. But why do you ask?"

"I will tell you—simply because half an hour or so before I came and spoke to you, when darkness was creeping over us all and the moon was just struggling to show herself, I watched her under cover of the shadow yonder," and he points to the

awning, "throw something overboard. I guessed what it was, and I was right."

"And what was it?"

"Only the bottle from which I dosed Claude this afternoon."

"Is it gone?"

"Yes."

"Old Dan'l or Jim might have taken it. Besides, what could have been her motive?"

"Dan'l might, but he did not. As to her motive I cannot say; as in the case of what she threw over, I can only guess. Still, you must say nothing, remember—only, perhaps if you and I keep our eyes open, we may see more in time. The brandy is no great loss, either, compared with the merry night the mermen and mermaids will have on the strength of it," and he takes my hand and holds it a moment, as though he will fain say more.

"You do not mean to say that—that the brandy was drugged?" and I shiver all over.

"I mean to say nothing, and you must be equally quiet; still, I mean to watch the girl."

"And I will watch her too."

Mr. Graeme strolls off to papa and Claude, and I note that as they talk Claude's eyes rest on Bee as she and mamma sit together. Nor do I wonder when, turning my eyes their way, I see how Bee is looking. Mamma is reading aloud to keep Bee from thinking of the afternoon. Standing here by myself I listen to mamma's beautifully modulated voice as she gives out each word, and I know that she is reading the "Marquis of Lossie." I read it once during my school-days, waking early in the morning to do so before the other girls' tongues were set loose for the day. It filled me with romantic notions then, and I feel the same romance stealing over me now. I feel for Clementina in her noble yet jealous musings. It must be hard to be jealous of one's dearest friends—I hope I shall never be jealous of any one, but there is no fear of that.

Looking at Bee, however, reminds me still more of Clementina—she has just the fair radiance of face, the moonlight softness. Of course Bee is younger than the other, but there is the same sweet subtlety, the gracious yet shadowy outline; and now as I muse I say to myself that I am Florimel, and that Florimel was never jealous of her friend.

I jealous of Bee! good gracious, where does the thought come from? Bee would not harbour even an ungenerous thought for the world. And yet Claude has veered

off from his two companions and is now leaning over her chair: apparently he listens to mamma's reading, only when Bee half turns from him with a gesture of impatience he stands upright, and looking about him, catches sight of my wistful face as I gaze full upon him. Yes, I know I am looking like that, and now that he is come I cannot help sighing, though why I cannot tell you.

"Where did that sigh come from?" he asks.

"From nowhere—only, I suppose, I am too happy, and so must give vent to it some way."

"But you didn't look over-happy a minute or so ago?" and Claude regards me fixedly.

"Didn't I? To tell the truth, I was feeling for Clementina—the lady who is jealous in mamma's book," and I laugh, or at least try to, which is all one. "But I am happy now."

"Has my coming made you so?" I feel that Claude is in earnest for my answer. Dear Claude, it will please him to find that it is so, therefore I say—

"Yes."

"Then I will always keep by you, little lady, and we will be happy together." Yet even as he speaks I have a strong sense of shrinking away, and of wishing to hide myself from him.

\* \* \* \* \*

We have partaken of supper beneath the bright moonlight as usual, and now we are all walking in pairs back and forth, Bee and I of course bringing up the rear.

"It is sweet to be walking and living still," coos Bee, leaning fondly upon my arm, and bringing her face close to mine.

"Yes, you darling! I don't know, Bee, how I could have lived without you. We have always loved each other, haven't we?"

"Yes, from the very first day we met, and, please God, we'll keep true to each other always—always." Bee is very solemn; but then she has been near to death, and therefore ought to be so.

"Do you like the 'Marquis of Lossie,' dear?" I inquire, after a pause.

"Yes; only it seems funny, when we all know him to be Florimel's brother, to think of her friend as jealous of her. Still, Clementina didn't know he was her brother, did she?"

"No. Bee, were you ever jealous?"

"Jealous? Yes, of you, dear. When you talked that last day at Bury House about getting married and all that I was vexed, because, you see, I wanted to keep you all to myself. I believe I almost

sanced till then that you and I would be all in all to each other. I made up my mind that day, that I should hate whoever you loved, but I don't, dear—I don't hate Claude, and I never shall; and—yes, I am very glad you have him to love you and make you happy."

"Then you love him for my sake?"

"Who said that I loved him?" and Bee turns upon me more sharply than ever I should have thought she could.

"I thought you meant that," and I feel my face crimsoning, although, as I well know, the kindly moonlight hides it all.

"And you are right, dear." Bee speaks very softly. "Still, it is for your dear sake—always for your sake; remember that." She kisses me, and lays her cheek, which is burning hot, against mine. I think her a bit strange, and that is all, for were I in Bee's place I suppose I should be strange too.

To-night I cannot sleep. My berth is narrow and hot, and I say that the fresh air and novelty of the day do not make up for the heat and discomfort of the night. I say, too, as I toss about in my restlessness, that I hope Mr. Graeme will press his point with Claude, and that we shall return home to Weymouth to-morrow. I feel that he was right when he said I was not happy, though why it should be so I cannot tell. I think of many things—of Louise, and why she threw the brandy overboard. I worry myself to find out a cause, but I can think of none. Louise did not know Claude till she came to us, and why—but here I grow confused, and I suppose fall asleep, to see Louise as a mermaid rise out of the sea. Claude and Bee are watching her also; and now at her touch and bidding they lower themselves into the fearful water, floating off hand in hand together, singing the mermaids' magic song, and I—I am left alone to mourn my love, which I feel I have lost for ever.

I awake. A glimmering of daylight is now around me, and I open my eyes to discover Louise creeping softly away from my side. "Louise, why are you here?" I fretfully inquire.

"I had orders, Miss Mary, to see Miss Thring once or twice during the night; and then I thought, as I could not sleep, I would just come and have a look at you." Louise has come back, and is standing so as to look straight down upon me as I lie.

"Well, I am all right," I say; "and, Louise, I consider your coming a great impertinence—an impertinence of which I shall complain to mamma."

"Very well, Miss Mary, it will make no difference to me."

"You are mistaken: if I complain, mamma will dismiss you at once."

"That is, when we are again on land, Miss Mary. But it will make no difference, as I have said, as I intended leaving as soon as my trial-month was over."

"Very well. I am glad."

There is a sort of pathos in her backward glance as she leaves me to myself—a look which softens me towards her, since it must have been love which brought her here—love for me; and I remember her tenderness to me only this very day—or stay, it was yesterday, since it is morning now.

#### CHAPTER IV.

**W**E are moving gently on, the sea breaking in merry ripples as the yacht cuts them asunder in its progress. Oh, it is glorious to be here! the sky and the waters are both so blue, and the breeze so fresh and grateful; and as I come up from below Claude meets me, and taking me in his arms gives me a good-morning kiss, which quite sets me right, and makes me forget all the silly thoughts which have vexed me the night through. Bee follows, her navy-blue cambric trimmed with ribbons of a lighter hue, which add to the pale glory of her loveliness. Claude takes her hand likewise, hoping that the occurrence of yesterday will not be the occurrence of to-day, at which Bee smiles and says, the blush of a white rose tinting her purely pale cheek the while—

"There is no fear, I think. I was half dreaming when it happened, and I suppose I turned giddy too. However, I will be careful to-day."

Mr. Graeme saunters up; he says he has been at the helm for the last three hours; and now we all see that we have turned about, and are proceeding in quite a contrary direction.

"You don't want to go back?" asks Claude, half releasing, half retaining his hold upon me, the while Bee stands, her eyes fixed far away upon the fairy waters.

"Yes, I do. The fact is, old fellow, I've taken a great liberty; but—we stand, you see, on equal ground: we each owe the debt of life, and we have paid it too, although owing it still," and he laughs. "If you remember, though, you told me to consider the yacht as my own, and I have done so in the full hope of your not turning crusty about it, when I have told you my reasons."

"And what may they be?"

"That I pant for my own mountain air, and that I pant for you to enjoy a good blow of it likewise."

"As though we got no air here," and Claude is, as I see, half offended.

"Ah, but sea air is not good for all," interposes Mr. Graeme. "Mountain air always invigorates, and I mean it to invigorate you and me very soon."

"Well, well, it makes no difference"—still, as I know, Claude is angry—"only the next time I ask a fellow to come a trip, I'll take good care to forget to tell him to consider the yacht as his own."

We have but few amusements on board : the gentlemen play at chess and draughts sometimes, and Bee and mamma and I have our books and work. Still, what we account our greatest pleasure is, I think, lazily watching the aspect of the shores and the different changes as we slowly yet steadily make our way along. Claude is better as the days pass (for we proceed but slowly and halt ever and anon), till we all take it for granted it is even as Mr. Graeme says, that the thought of home is doing him good already.

Bee seems languid and weak, lying for hours at a time upon the cushions under the awning, yet smiling sweetly enough all the while, as though with the real earnest wish of impressing all with the knowledge that she is very, very happy, and that she desires us to be the same. Old Dan'l tells us tales by moonlight of things too unlikely to be believed, though when we laugh and say so he gets angry and leaves us, only to vent his spite upon poor Jim, whom he treats like a galley-slave, after which he again returns to "spin more yarns," which he further qualifies by asserting to be "as true as true," and thus the time passes on.

\* \* \* \* \*

We are here at Weymouth in time for the regatta. Claude allows his yacht to lie at ease out of the way ; we get a delightful view of the races, and on the whole I think it the most enjoyable day we have spent since we have been together. I suppose we were thrown too much upon each other before, as Mr. Graeme said—at any rate, the novel sights and the gay dresses seem quite a treat, and I for one enjoy myself immensely.

Towards evening we all leave the yacht (all save the crew, who are Claude, Mr. Graeme, Dan'l, and Jim). We shall have a better view of the fireworks from our own balcony ; but I feel leaving Claude, and I say that I shall be thinking of him the whole time. Mr. Graeme, who watches the parting between us, gives a sharp

glance at Bee, but she is stepping from the gangway to the pier, as though she has no thought for him. I hope he cares for her, though, and that she cares for him, for something tells me that his love is worth having, and that the one he loves will be very, very precious in his eyes. I like him, I say, although in all things he and I do not agree ; but then—and I steal a glance at Claude, who is handsome and happy enough to please any one—if I agree with *one*, that is all I need care or think about.

We have dined, and refreshed ourselves with tea, and now we sit in the balcony, waiting for the first of the fireworks. Claude's yacht is illuminated like the others ; they all look brilliant, yet I single out the one which is to me as my love himself, my love thinking of me and longing to be with me, as he will be for always by-and-by. I think of the old school-days, which somehow seem to me as so far off. Then I was a child, eager for gaiety ; then my ideas of things generally were childish too. Now, however, I know otherwise : I know that being married is not all merry-making and fun and change, and I could cry for very joy at taking up my life's lot and its love-crown too. Bee converses sweetly with mamma ; papa has a friend or two who are evidently posting him up with town news. I myself talk when I please, which is not often ; and yet, though I feel happy and would not for the world have things other than they are, I am not satisfied.

Now it is all over—the gaiety, I mean ; now the moon reigns supremely over all ; and now, too, the streets are deserted, save by a few idlers, who pause to greet each other, and speak a few words before making their way homeward. I am tired, but I cannot sleep ; instead, I stand by the window of my room, looking out still at the solitary blue light which Claude will keep burning till morning for me and me alone. But hush ! Some one is talking at the area gate below. I look down, and perceive Louise and a woman whose face I cannot rightly see, but whom I judge to be handsome, and with a carriage and figure which is at once fine, commanding, and extremely proud in its bearing. I almost fancy they see me, and yet I do not suppose they have—at any rate, they separate, Louise coming in, and the woman going on up the street, as though her home or lodgings lay in that direction.

I cannot rest, though—I cannot go to bed ; instead, I creep into Bee's room, thinking that if she is still awake we will talk and so pass the time away ; but Bee

is asleep. I carry a candle in my hand, and as the light falls upon her pure face and fair hair I half fancy that she cannot be human like myself, half fancy that earth has no such hold upon her as it has on me, and now I am wondering, too, why I am beloved before Bee, who is so transcendently lovely ; but I only wish I were like her.

\* \* \* \*

Bee and I are out early this morning. Bee has a book of poetry with her, from which she reads aloud, a bit here and a bit there, as we sit on the sands and wait for Claude and Mr. Graeme. I am not poetical, I think, and yet one bit strikes me so that I ask her to read it over again, whereat Bee softly murmurs :—

" Two boats rocked on the river,  
In the shadow of leaf and tree—  
One was in love with the sea-shore,  
And one was in love with the sea."

The one that loved the harbour  
The winds of fate ouphore,  
And left the other longing  
For ever upon the shore."

A little while we are silent, but now Bee suddenly says, in a musing yet earnest tone of voice, " Strange, isn't it, Queenie, that so many of us possess our best gifts but in longing only ? I dare say, now, that the boat which loved the harbour judged and dreamt more blissfully of its calm than it ever would had it stayed within its shelter and have had its heart's desire."

" And the one who longed for the waves and had the quiet, Bee, what of it ? " I love to hear Bee talk.

" Oh, its lot would be harder still—to the outward eye, at least. Still, who can tell ? Queenie, to my mind the two boats are two souls, each desiring its own lot in life—or, it may be, *love*." Dear Bee is so gently serious that I leave off thinking of Claude to give her my full attention. " The one adrift upon the sea, maybe, has its wish in one way, but accompanied with duties hard to do battle with and be borne ; yet the very hardness gives strength, I think, and in the moments of quiet the picture of what life might have been must be very strong, bright, and earnest—besides, there will be rest and the shore at last ; while as for the other, if the soul be not very pure, very true to its purpose, it will lose its ballast and perish, though close to the very shore, which maybe in a future state has been meant as its rest and reward. Yes, I think the one upon the shore in its idle loneliness is to be felt for the most, because if it does not hold fast by what it desires, and enjoy the hold too, which is to some very hard, it will have time to grow discon-

tented, time to forget the Master's hand, who serves out to all as it seems Him best."

" But, Bee dear, it is not always so—our lives are not always at cross purposes with our desires. I think, dear, that we can shape our lots in a great measure for ourselves ; for instance, if I longed for the sea, I would go there, else I am sure I should beat my life out upon the rocks surrounding the shore. I could not bear being driven from what I loved and desired—I am sure I couldn't, Bee. I have dreamt of love always, and I felt sure that Claude and I would love each other, and—it is so. Bee, I could not live if I had not a love ; and I wonder now that I know how proud and happy it makes one, how so many others in the world can live and smile without it."

" They do not," is Bee's quiet response. " They have their love in the longing after it. The most of them, perhaps, carry about a grave in their heart of hearts. No, there are not many women, Queenie, without a love at all ; and, darling, in dwelling upon its sweetness, longing after its fulness, believe me, there are tints and colourings, a softness, light and varied, such as reality never knows, so that perhaps, after all, the substance is theirs, and the shadow only belonging to those others who, in the mere flesh-and-blood grasp, think that they have their all."

" But I like the firm grasp. I like to feel that I have Claude, not to dream of him."

" Yes, we all would have it so—else why the longing ? Still, dear, it is wrong to suppose that those who have it not are yet without their loves. All women have loves of their own, and some with but the outward fulfilment thereof hold the inward presence till death as purely, as sweetly in their heart of hearts as even their Maker can desire them, and to them He sends sweeter visions, sweeter sighings from the home of love itself than can be for those who seem to be able to turn their barque whithersoever they will."

" Yes, theirs is an ideal love. I wonder if Claude is my real ideal ! I have heard say that we all have ideals, and that supposing we wait for them, they will be sure to come to us."

" If we wait, yes. Some hold that the very longing, if we but foster it, will in time bring its reward in kind. Yet it may not be what the world's eye can see, after all it may be but an inward possession, nothing more. I once read of a poor idiot who grew up to manhood believing himself to be rich and clever. He even went so

far as to fancy himself a great preacher, and at odd corners of the streets would deliver quaint orations, would marry and bury as he thought fit, after which he would call for his horse, and believing in the animal as in everything else in his visionary world, trot off through the village, stopping with a jerk as he threw imaginary reins to an invisible groom at the gates of the principal houses in the place, where he loitered and carried on long conversations with grand folk, of whom he had heard but never seen, after which he again remounted and rode away, well pleased with himself and with everybody else."

"But then he had never known any but this shadowy grandeur. I can likewise fancy people dreaming of love or riches in the same way ; but, Bee, after tasting of the sweets of reality it would make me bitter, very bitter with all the world to have my love or my best thing whatsoever taken from me. I could never treasure it up. I should hate it, and everybody, and especially those who were happier than myself. Bee," as a new thought strikes me, "you can never have loved, or you would not talk so."

"Perhaps not." Her face is crimson and her voice unsteady. "Yet I know what love is, and, Queenie, I will own this much to you, my dearest and only real friend—I—I do love, but hopelessly, dear, so that it must never be mentioned again, even between us two. Queenie, my love is perfect now—a closer knowledge would not reveal him as such to me, and I am content to have things as they are. I shall ever have him perfect, you see," and Bee half laughs, though in an hysterical way, and only because she will not cry.

"Poor Bee ! Is there no hope ? But you will forget and love another," and I squeeze her arm affectionately.

"I may ; yet if I do not I shall be happy. Who can say, dear, but that in the years to come my love may be brighter for me in its haze than yours in its glory, just as the calm is more than calm, even Heaven itself, to the boat tossing amid the waves, while to the one harbour-bound the ocean path and its wild tumults seem the only way to the great deeds and the victory for which it pants and pants day by day."

"Bee"—I hesitate—"has he—I mean, the one you think—ever spoken?" I will not look her way ; instead, I take to piling sand, as the children do. If I could unsay my words too — why, I would.

There is a long pause, and then, "No,

Queenie, and I ought not to have breathed of my folly even to you.' There is a great pair in her voice, and I pile my sands higher and higher. "He has not spoken—it is wrong, perhaps, to love him ; and yet men fall in love with whom they will, and we can no more control our affections than they—at least, so I have found it."

"Then you have fallen in love?" There is a great mystery in my question, and I regard Bee in quite a new light, for I cannot understand her altogether.

"Yes. Isn't it dreadful? Queenie, I think we will not speak of it again—it is unmaidenly."

Nor do we, but when I have given her time to recover herself I see by the very look of her face that her tale is true. Her love is changing her mightily : pure and lovely she was before, but she is far purer and more lovely now. It is as though the hidden lights of her soul were shining forth, lending a radiance and a glory which time will cause to brighten as the years pass, so that perchance old age for her will be more lovely than even youth.

Claude and Mr. Graeme are close by. Claude sinks down upon the sands at my feet, Mr. Graeme, after a minute or so, leaves us to join papa and mamma, who are on the esplanade above. Claude stretches himself out, and tilting his hat over his eyes, complains of being weary ; while Bee and I hold our umbrella so as to give him all the shade we can. I tell him how nice the fireworks were last night, and he says he is glad ; but I feel just a little shy of telling him how I watched the yacht and the blue light all for his sake. He is tired, for he has not slept at all, he says ; and so Bee reads while we listen ; and do what I will, my hand will stray to Claude's face, which I pat and caress the whole time.

Suddenly I start and look up, to meet the gaze of two handsome dark eyes fixed upon us ; and although I did not see the face of the woman to whom Louise talked upon the area steps, I know it is the same ; and now as though the steadfast look of her bold eyes are likewise arousing Claude from his weary listlessness, he pushes back his hat, and looking up confronts her also.

I see him fix his gaze, and presently when she has quite passed on, forgetful of Bee's reading, he says, "Queenie, yonder goes the woman I saw in the West Indies, the one whom I said so strangely resembled your maid."

"How funny!" and I tell him of

last night, and of the two talking together when all the other folk had gone home.

"*Depend upon it, the two are mother and daughter,*" is Claude's reply; "and I must say, Queenie, that I don't half like your having that girl about you."

"She is going to leave at her month's end," I say, "and of her own free will too, so there's nothing to fear" and I smile down into Claude's face. "Besides, I don't think she would do me any harm. I rather think she is fond of me."

"As though she could help being fond of you!" and Claude holds fast my hand and carries it to his lips. So, then, Claude thinks that none can help loving me? It is good to be told so, and by him. Ah, but I will never change; and he? Well, I hope that he will never change either.

## CHAPTER V.

IT is the half-hour before dinner. Bee and I are dressed, but in nothing costly, seeing that we shall be out again by-and-by to listen to the band, and to enjoy the sea-fog, which is even now coming on. We merely wear white cambric—Bee has knots of pale pink at throat, waist, and wrists; I have a double string of pearls about my neck, and a pearl bracelet and ring, besides which we have no ornament at all. The others are not yet down, for be it known we are not very punctual here, and really I think not many people are punctual by the sea. We two, however, sit and wait, one on each side of the open window, when the door opens and Edward Graeme appears before us.

"An unexpected pleasure, I'm sure," and he appropriates a chair between the two. "I thought to have had the felicity of a full quarter of an hour alone."

"You are disappointed, then," I say shortly. "Where's Claude, though, Mr. Graeme? He was to have come, you know."

"Yes, and he'll be here directly; but as he hadn't called when I was ready, I just came on in the hope of—"

"A lonely half-hour," puts in Bee.

"No; to tell the truth, I really hoped to see one or both of you here waiting."

"I wonder which would have pleased you best—the one, or both?" I question, glancing at Bee, who is smiling out over the sea as though the brightness of her countenance were about to dispel the fog.

"You can decide that matter for yourself," is the grave reply; then, after a pause, and watching Bee intently, as though anxious to read her thoughts, "I wonder what Miss Churchill will say when I tell her it is quite arranged that we all leave here for Scotland somewhere about the middle of next week?"

"That she doesn't believe it."

In return I get an amused smile, which more than half makes me angry. "You may believe it, then, for I assure you it is the truth."

"But mamma!" I exclaim, looking at Bee. "Louise is leaving her in a few days, and it will take some time to fill her place. We can do without a maid here, but travelling is—"

"I have provided for all emergencies," is the quick rejoinder.

"*You* have provided!"

"Yes, I am to take charge of all valuables on the journey, and I warrant they will all be safe, even if I do not put my foot on the jewel-box, which is, I believe, the orthodox way. In my own house, too, I can supply needful attendance, in the shape of a trim little Scotch maid, who has, as we say, 'a natural giftie' in the way of disposing of finery."

Well, it seems that we are to go to Scotland; but, for all that, I am not reconciled to the thought, nor do I mean to be, either—at least, so I tell Claude.

\* \* \* \*

It is a strange old house to which Mr. Graeme welcomes us—a house with a background of rugged hills, made splendid now with heather and gorse, but bare and ugly enough in winter-time, as I am very well sure. In front is a stretch of what he calls lawn, being no other than alternate patches of turf and sand, with here and there a brown rock to diversify the scene, till the whole merges into sands and rocks without number; and further on the sea—wild, turbulent, and unbounded. On one side the house is a plantation of Scotch firs, the scent of which is borne to me as I stand here in the doorway; on the other a mountain curve and wild, lonely moorland, which, like the lawn here, stretches down to the very sea.

It is early morning, not much later than six by the clock, and though by-and-by the day will be hot, there is now a coolness and a golden glamour everywhere. Two horsemen are visible a long way off, where apparently the sand of the sea-shore and the turf of the moors meet and join themselves together. I wonder if Bee and I can have horses to ride? If so, I think I

may be happy here, especially with Claude to share all and everything. A small figure, quaintly yet tastefully clad, though but in ordinary peasant garments, now comes in sight from the way leading to the back of the house and the mountains beyond. In her hand she carries a basket filled to overflowing with heather and other flowers of hardy growth, besides which she likewise bears tiny branches of fir, as though she had just gathered them in the plantation to the left.

This is Elspie, the maid whom Mr. Graeme has desired us to consider as devoted to our use. I have scarce seen her before, but now as she pauses to say "Good morning," I am struck by the openness of her small, delicate face, and by a something, I cannot say what, in the expression of her violet eyes.

"Good morning, Elspie," I say—to tell the truth, I am glad to have some one to whom I can talk, and Bee has not as yet come down. "What are these for?" and I touch the flowers and greenery which she bears.

"They are for the rooms," and she colours a little—"that is, if you will like them. Mr. Edward says they give a Scotch smell to everything."

"They don't look much, do they?"

"No," and her countenance falls; "but then they are all the flowers I have."

"And you make the most of them," I go on. "I like your way, Elspie, and presently I shall be able to judge of your decorations," and I let her pass, for she is, as I can see, eager to be gone.

I watch the horsemen a little longer; I watch the glint of the tossing waves, but now I am tired, and therefore I turn away and enter the large hall, where, as I know, I shall find Elspie busy with her flowers. The scent of the firs is everywhere, and now I am filled with surprise, for even the dishes upon the table are surrounded with delicate wreathings, while the few pictures upon the walls, and the trophies of the chase likewise, are more than lovely because of the contrast between the delicacy of the simple, hardy flowers and them.

"I doubt if any flowers would beat these," I say, looking around; and Elspie's voice has a ring of gladness as she replies—

"The rhododendrons did in the spring-time, miss; they were just glorious."

The girl is Scotch, yet she speaks English as purely as I do, and because of her very simplicity I ask her how it is.

"Because," and her whole face lights up,

"Mr. Edward has taught me. He has not told you, seeing that to do so would be to proclaim his own goodness; but he found me when I was a little child, alone and dying with cold upon the bitter moors. He brought me home, miss, and so kind has every one been to me that I have never known a single want or sorrow since."

Mamma's bell rings, and Elspie trips away to obey the summons, while I, with a strange light suddenly entering my bewildered brain, wonder whether or not Edward Graeme will marry Elspie? But no, it cannot be, and yet—but I will forget it and hope for Bee still. Hope for Bee! Who has told me that it is he for whom Bee cares? No one; and now I rather think it is not, else why should she have spoken of her love as hopeless? She knew nothing of Elspie then, and now it seems to me that I am sure it is not Edward Graeme whom she meant.

Still, things are strange between us all. Papa and mamma look a little sadly at me sometimes. I suppose they are thinking of the time when I shall have another home than theirs; but I think if I ask Claude he will make his home with them nearly always; at any rate, I will see what I can do. Then there is Bee—well, Bee clings to me at one time and hides away from me and everybody directly after; but oh, when she is with us, calm, lovely, and devoted to all our comfort, it is then I wonder most that Mr. Graeme does not worship her, for her calmness, her sweetness seem well-nigh that of an angel. Mr. Graeme is grave, courteous, and a perfect host in every way; I often notice a look in his eyes which puzzles me, often catch a wistful, longing smile lingering about his lips. Yesterday it brought the tears to my eyes, and he saw it. Since then I have scarcely dared look at him, for I think my tears offended him, though I am sure I did not mean them to.

I am waiting for Claude in the fir plantation as I think all this, and as I catch the echo of his step I say that Claude is the strangest of us all. But then love does change one so; it has changed me, for I am not nearly so gay as I was. I am not happy either, but I suppose I shall be when I am settled. I remember Cousin Clara said when I saw her three months after her marriage, that only a girl who was married could tell what a relief it was to have to leave off worrying, and to feel that there is nothing more left to hope for.

But Claude is whispering me that he has spoken to papa about the wedding.

He says he wants to get it over, for that he is sure I am tired of his stupid ways, and I answer him by asking if I am tired now how it will be by-and-by.

"But I shall be different then, Queenie—a man is always at his best when he is settled. Queenie, we shall be very happy. I will never pass over your slightest wish, and I will be as good to you, darling, as I know how."

It seems that we both gaze into each other's eyes as though each would fain read the other's soul. "And, Claude, what can I do?" I cry. "I must do something to make you happy—give you something. Oh, Claude, I will give you—my heart, and—I will be good too."

Papa wishes us to wait till after my next birthday, but Claude says "No." Dear Claude, how he must love me! He even pleads that the wedding may be here at the Castle; and now he is gone to town for the express purpose of ordering some necessary arrangements, and buying presents for me, although, as I tell him, I really think we had better wait.

Bee and mamma have gone for a long drive, but Claude may return at any hour, therefore I stay at home, but—really, I have another reason—I want to think everything over, for I am not happy even now. I wonder why it is? I wonder if Edward Graeme sees it? I cannot think, either—at least, not as I want to; instead, I notice the view seaward, now that I can trace even the progress of the tiniest boats, though ever so far away. There is clear, bright light over it all, but no glory, no misty haze veiling what directly after the sun may perhaps make known, no sparkle as of joy—no, only a steady light which just shows one all at once. Look as I may, I shall see nothing new—nothing to surprise me or give me sudden joy.

And like this is all my future life. I wish it were not all arranged. I wish—with the old childishness too—that I could not for its very glory see beyond the wedding-day. I had thought, too, and oh! I had dreamt so fondly of love's joys ever new and ever rising. Oh! I wonder if that was all nonsense, or whether my dream was truth, and the reality I am now looking forward to a myth, and no real love at all.

I hear a step, and Mr. Graeme comes upon me, his face grave and rather troubled. Till now I had fancied him with mamma and Bee; and as though divining my very thoughts, he says, "The view is wonderfully clear to-day, Miss Churchill."

"Yes, I have been noticing it; but why are you not with mamma and Bee?"

"Because," and he looks steadily into my face, "I preferred staying at home, and because I wished to ask you a question."

"Well?" I say; but he is gazing seaward, and does not, I suppose, hear me. Now he is turning my way, though. "Miss Churchill, has it never struck you that your friend seems—well, rather too quiet, as though not exactly happy at times?"

"As compared with myself, perhaps," and I colour wildly, as I can feel. "I always was a rattle-cap, Mr. Graeme, and Bee was always as she is now, quiet."

"Queenie—you said I might call you so—your description of yourself is not good. You have never been like that since I have known you—merry you can be, I know, by the gleam of your eye; but though sometimes you try hard, you are not exactly what nature intended."

"I am happy, always happy," and I think of Claude, wishing he were here.

"And you are satisfied?" His gravely tender eyes are scanning my face, and, recklessly unmindful of the truth, I reply—

"Of course I am. Why do you ask?"

"Only because sometimes I have fancied it might not be so. Still, child, it is nothing to me," and he bends a little, as I think, to read my face the better.

"Thank you, but I am satisfied," and I rise and walk away. He does not follow, yet when I presently look back he is watching me still.

I wish Claude were here! I wish I had never seen Mr. Graeme! I wish he and Bee were to be married upon the same day as Claude and I. But then there is Elspie. I hear her singing even now amongst the rocks—some secret the girl must have to be always so blithe and joyous. I even think that I could hate her for it too, but that she seems so childish, so fresh and innocent in her joy. I count over the weeks I have known Edward Graeme. I wonder if he does love Bee, if he will marry her; and now I am looking on into their future, if it ever be as I have said; but I suddenly drop my face into my hands, for it is no fault of mine if I am not satisfied with my own lot in life. It is no fault of mine that Claude does not hang upon my every look and tone, does not follow me with his eyes, does not worship my footfall and kiss my very shadow—no, not my fault, any more

than that he is not the happy Claude of the first week at Weymouth, or that I—good heavens ! I start and shiver—or that I think more of Edward Graeme than of him. I see it now, but—I have been blind before—what shall I do ?

I look about me for help to save me from myself. I have never been so far along the shore till now, and stretching out into the sea is a dry, sandy path leading to a tall, brown rock, which looks so nice and pleasant, and, above all, so sheltering that I think I will go over and sit beneath its shadow. The tide is out and the sand dry, so that I am soon there ; and then I try to think of Claude only, and hope he is at home by now. I wonder if I have been wicked, if I am wicked still ? Ah, well, I will make up to dear Claude ; I will think only of him, or better still, I will not think at all ; and—with a little sob—when I am married I will never let him leave me, but I will go with him everywhere, everywhere.

I do not think any more—at least, I do not believe I am thinking ; I only sit and look out over the clear blue waters, 'till, feeling cramped, I rise and stretch myself a little and look around. I have seen the waves come in, dashing against the side of the rock—seen them as in a dream ; but now slowly I take the matter in, a dumb despair stealing over me the while : the way I came here by is entirely covered, and I am all alone. I run madly to the way I think I came ; I rush boldly on, till, as I gasp for breath, I feel a dash of salt spray in my mouth. How I manage to get back ~~I hardly know~~, but weary and hopeless I throw myself down upon my island and weep.

I think I should faint but for the horrible fear of passing the night here by myself, with but the sea-gulls to bear me company. I think I am losing consciousness, though, for—what is this ? Water ! water ! rising and sweeping over my very feet ! Oh, what if at high-water even the very rock is covered ? It may be so, for all I know, and yet I try to climb it ; it is my only hope, and even though I am to die I will, at least try to save my life if I can.

I tear my hands and my dress ; but I do not care, it is for life, dear life ! Now I am upon the top, with the waves beating about me. I will not look down, for I am giddy, and might fall—I am falling now, yet I strain my eyes far out to the distant land, and now I see a dark object floating this way, battling through the waves, now hidden, now again in sight. I do not hope from it, yet I watch it, all the while feeling

as though I were going mad. I have not closed my eyes yet—I am dreaming. Good heavens ! I am sinking down ! I shall die ! but no, a voice calls above the roaring of the waters. I know the voice—it is Edward Graeme's ; and now I am in reality sinking ; but it is into his arms, and he is bearing me away, the tide throwing us onward with mighty throws and jerks. Luckily there are no rocks just here upon the shore, and now—now at last he has laid me upon the shingle, high and dry above, and out of breath and exhausted as he is, he yet bends over me and utters a fervent "Thank God !" because that he has saved me.

I cannot, I will not, open my eyes, yet now that I am feeling better he must see the rising colour upon my cheek. Oh, Claude ! Claude ! I am well-nigh beside myself, for now at length do I know all !

" Queenie, you are safe !" I feel his breath upon my face, and looking up I meet his gaze, gravely kind as ever, fixed upon me. He helps me to my feet, but I tremble so that I cannot walk. He bids me rest a little first, yet he does not talk to me ; it seems that he cannot ; and now his strong right arm is helping me home to the Castle, which I would I had never seen.

## CHAPTER VI.

**E**LSPIE, who has stayed in my room all night, and tended me like a sister, comes and begs me not to go down this morning ; but I am dressed, and I must be brave supposing Claude comes. Edward Graeme has breakfasted a full hour before, and is gone out, so Elspie says. Bee has a headache, and will not come down till later on ; papa has gone on horseback to meet Claude ; and mamma is already busy with her letters.

Elspie tries to make me eat and drink, but even her sweetness and winning ways hurt me. She talks of Edward Graeme and his kindness the whole of the time, and as I watch the fluttering of colours upon her childish and changeful face I say that he must love her and she him. I say, too, that I am a little simpleton, for that Edward Graeme loves me not, though I feel almost as though I could die for him. True, he saved my life. Well, he has saved Claude's, too ; he would do his utmost for any one in extreme need. Oh, but I must do something—I cannot think. I will go out ; and so I ask Elspie to go with me a long, long ramble, if so be that mamma can spare her.

Mamma can spare her, and now we are rounding the mountain curve where I have been before, and Elspie points out a little hut or cottage here and there in which, she says, fishermen dwell; and to one far removed from the rest she is leading the way, because, as she says, we will have our fortunes told by an old gipsy woman who makes this hut her home—that is, when she is not wandering from place to place.

I am excited; I long to hear the sibyl's verdict, although I do not believe in such things any more than do other young people who yet are eager to test the like folly; but I must confess I am taken aback at the sound of loud voices issuing from the open doorway of the place, and it requires all Elspie's encouragement to persuade me to proceed and not to turn back without the coveted foreknowledge. We come upon the group before they see us, and I start as I see crouching upon the floor, and facing us, Louise, while the one whom I take to be the gipsy stands confronting the woman I saw at Weymouth—the woman with the fine figure and the bold, handsome black eyes.

"And so," we hear the gipsy say, "ye forced the girl to give a 'love-potion,' as ye called it, never telling her that, so far as ye knew, the lad was her own brother. I call it *poison*, though, and so does she now; but no doubt ye would have been glad to have got rid of him, and to have passed yourself and the lass off as the widow and daughter of the old Claude Churchill. No doubt ye would have been glad, I say!" and the woman laughs a taunting, mocking laugh, which makes the other woman mad to hear.

"I never told her he was her brother," she gasps. "I merely said she was to do the thing, and she did it. She was always obedient till—" But now they see us, and Louise gives a great cry of shame and covers her face, while Elspie, who knows the gipsy well, tells her with all haste who and what I am.

"Come in, come in," and Rachel, the gipsy, makes room. I take my place by Louise—poor Louise, who cowers and trembles so. "It is meet ye should know all; the time has come for the truth, and the truth ye shall have," and Rachel glares savagely upon her antagonists, "Ye are not the widow of Claude Churchill! Ye may ha' proofs, but I can bring living proofs. Ye are his sister-in-law, with slave's blood in your veins—the woman of who, being mixed up in the Verdant Mount murder, escaped by my help to his house, where he made ye welcome till one dreadful night when he discovered why you had

come and what you were; then he drove you forth. It was a pitiless night, and death was abroad. Your sister died that night, leaving a weak little babe behind—died on a journey to some place where you should never hear of her more; and as the people about heard nothing of her death, they believed you when, years after, you went back to the place to gather your proofs together—believed that you were Louise Churchill; but you had sense enough not to urge your claim till you should have killed the heir, or at least till the weak girl whom you believed to be his sister should have dyed her hands with the blood of her own brother."

"He is her brother"—there is a tone of wicked triumph in the words—"and I defy anybody to disprove that I am not Claude Churchill's first wedded wife."

"I can defy back again," and Rachel's hand strokes softly Elspie's golden locks. "This is Claude Churchill's child! I swear it—I who stole her for you, and then gave you my own instead."

"Louise is like me—"

"Yes, and so was your brother like you—like you in face, like you in treachery and cunning. I was a poor gipsy, and he left me, though I was his wedded wife. I gave you the child, I had no love for it." A groan from Louise—poor Louise, how I pity her! Mamma shall take her back.

"You are disappointed, foiled. I could have you hung for his sake, but I will not. There is innocence still, left in the world," and once again the b:own hand strokes Elspie's hair. "I was well-nigh starving; I cast the child away from me, thinking that some one more pitiful than her own flesh and blood might take her, and some one did. I never told the child her story, never laid claims upon her, yet she has been good to me, has talked to me as an angel might from time to time, and for her sake I will say no more. Ah! but ye believed that Rachel the gipsy was dead, or ye would never have barefaced walked the earth. Ye were Clara Lavington when I knew you first, ye are Clara Lavington now, whatever new name ye may pretend to. This girl is Claude and Louise Churchill's child, and I swear that Louise was dead when Claude, selling his coffee plantations, broke off all tie with the Indies, and married the present Claude's mother. He was young and foolish when he married, but Louise was the angel of your family, and he would have done justice to the child had not I stolen it (vile wretch that I was) to avenge the wrong done by his kinsman to myself. Now,

however, the time is come when I must speak, and I solemnly declare that if you go one step farther it shall be through the Verdant Mount blood, and I was not fool enough to do anything I could not prove, now or whenever I chose, so that, thanks to me, your little game is over for ever."

How the woman raves I need not say, only at length when Rachel insists upon her going, and she calls Louise to accompany her, she will not, and now I am holding her in my arms, and she is saying how that she loved Bee and me from the first; we were the first sweet, pure living creatures she had known; that for my sake she had spared Claude—not that she had dreamt of poison or aught of evil to him; it was only a foolish girl's dream of marriage and aggrandisement: the dark plot of murder and poison lay deep in the heart of the bad woman she had till to-day called mother.

I take her home with me, and now we are all in a state of alarm. Bee's mother is ill, and she has been telegraphed for. I say that I will not stay when she has gone, and Claude has not come, and really I am afraid to face him. So papa, who has just returned with the carriage, advises that he and mamma, Bee and I, leave here at once; Claude, upon his return, staying behind to clear up the mystery which has taken us by storm.

Ah! well, all is over, only, as we are upon the way, I note Bee stretches her neck from the carriage window to get a view of a horseman crossing a field from the railway, as it seems. It is Claude. I catch a glimpse of Bee's face, of its far-away, intense look, of the passion of her eyes. Ah, it is enough! I know all now.

\* \* \* near Christmas, and I am in London.

mystery is cleared; Elspie being discovered to be Claude's sister, Louise—now my maid—the gipsy's child. The mystery is cleared, yet Claude lingers in Scotland. I wonder when he will come? Soon, I hope, for I have invited Bee to spend Christmas with me, and—I sigh—I will try to make her happy. Thus I muse in the drawing-room, and awfully fall asleep. A strangely troubled dream is about me, an unknown peril threatens me, through which, as through a mist, Edward Graeme hastens towards me, and I cry, stretching out my arms, "Edward, I will go any where; with you I could face death."

Ah! but my dream is half reality: Edward Graeme is beside me, holding my hand, and I would my foolish words were unspoken, and yet—

"Queenie, you cannot unsay it; I have

your word now, and oh, my darling! we will be as happy as the day is long," are the words I hear.

"And Claude?" I ask—I am strangely confused.

"He begs pardon for thinking of you in a secondary way, Queenie; and do you not guess where he is gone?"

"To Bee," I murmur; and now my answer is a kiss.

"You do not ask for Elspie, so I must tell you of her;" his arm is about me now. "Elspie has a canny Highlander—nay, Queenie, do not tremble—we have, between us, married her up to him; and by-and-by they are coming to us for a sight of our wonders and a second honeymoon."

Ah me! my heart is ringing out glad, happy, changeful music at last. This is love. This is bliss! This is satisfaction!

It is Christmas Eve, and our wedding-day—Bee's and mine. Elspie is here, and lots of pretty girls, and, would you believe it? we are Snow Queens all, only Bee and I wear orange-blossoms instead of snow-caps, as the bridesmaids do. I remind Bee once again of my having planned it at Bury House (she and I have just come downstairs to be packed away privately for exportation to St. George's, only being early, we sit down for our last girlish talk. It is strange to say so, to feel, in a dim, dreamy way, that the old life, with its glows and its glamour, its half-childish, half-womanly unrest of joy, is, as it were, to be put away after to-day for something more intense, fuller, more solemn—a life linked to another life through weal and through woe. Ah me! tears gather in my eyes as the thought comes to me, and I know—oh! I know, with the calmness of a strong, abiding love, that woe will not be woe in its deepest sense if only Edward be but beside me. Oh, my love will conquer and triumph over all, if so be that a giving of one's self in sweet abandonment, to weave into the noble existence of another, to minister, to serve, to glory in the giving, be love. My tears drip down, and I know Bee is deeply moved; her sweet, usually calm, pure face is gently tremulous as she whispers—

"Darling, I may tell you now—Claude loved me, and I him, from the time we first met, only—"

"Yes, yes, Edward told me—duty and poor little Queenie stood in the way. He thought I loved him, dear, and so he would have sacrificed even his Queen Bee. I see it now—the name of his yacht and all; but, Bee, you remember the slipper I threw after the wedding at Bury House? Well, it hit Edward, and—there you know.

He was in the back carriage of all, and I always knew the slipper went in. I hope there will be some ducks of slippers to-day——”

Somewhat I pause, for grave, earnest thoughts are gathering in Bee's eyes, and I —well, I am lightly glad, for is it not my wedding-day, with the cold daylight breaking through the haze without, as if the sun would anon peep through and shine upon us? Still, earnest musings are deep down in my breast too, a sweet song swelling within me, which none can know or interpret save they whose love has conquered and is conquered.

“Queenie,” says Bee, breaking the silence, nestling close to me like a timid dove, “do you remember the two boats we once read of and talked about, away by the sea?”

“Yes,” I reply; “but what of them?” Yet, even as I say it, my darling's words come back to me like a revelation. Ah me! we were the two poor little boats drifting and tossing, and neither blest, though I, like a happy, half-awakened child, knew it not.

“They are both having their love given them,” is the whispered response, which comes to me like a happy sigh.

“My poor, poor darling!” I make reply, “the winds of fate were merciful to us both,” and I seem to be speaking to the sweet, calm, noble Bee of that far-away day on the sands rather than to the Bee of this morning—a happy bride, waiting for a like crowning with me.

“Nay, dear, rather a higher Power than fate was merciful to us both, poor, purblind children, not half understanding what

was for our good.” Bee was ever so good and earnest in ways and thoughts.

“Well,” I make answer, “I know my harbour is sweetly tranquil, and I am thankfully content.”

“And I, oh! Queenie, I never expected to gain my heart's desire so; it seemed as if I should pine and die, locked to the plain, homely path of duty and love for another; and for all I could do or try to do, I could not make my silent misery noble.” Bee hugs me now, undemonstrative as she generally is.

“Oh, Bee, you were acting nobly all the time; and that other you mention was poor little me, who did not know my own mind, and that I was breaking another's heart—nay, two hearts. Oh, Bee, what silly girls we were in those days, you and I!” so saying, I laugh and I weep.

“Yes, Queenie, but I doubt if we should have been now so full of happiness to-day if we had not suffered.”

“Yes, yes,” I make answer, “I know—

‘How sublime a thing it is  
To suffer and be strong.’ ”

Suffer! why, I feel I could suffer all my life through with Edward, my own true-hearted, noble husband, as he is to be to-day, and as I think it I blush and tremble for very joy and timidity.

My life? Ah, but I cannot tell you of it! I can see no farther ahead than St. George's, Hanover Square—only, come weal, come woe, the tender haze of love alone will give it me, bit by bit, day by day—ever fresh to me will it seem, ever sweet, so long as love is given, and Bee and Elspie, I am sure, feel exactly the same.

EMMIE SEARCHFIELD.

THE END.

### FADED PETALS.

ONLY the scarlet petals of a flow'r  
Crush'd 'neath some wanton's feet,  
Ended its little life of one short hour—  
Gone all its fragrance sweet.  
Ah! tender blossom! for the summer made,  
How many lives like thine must droop and  
fade!

Only the scatter'd petals in my hand,  
See! they have life no more,  
No more their leaves will be by Zephyr  
fann'd,  
Those joys for them are o'er.

I press my lips in clinging, fond caress  
Upon their soil'd and mournful loveliness.

Young Zephyr lov'd thy sweet and dainty  
breath  
Whilst thou on earth wert fair,  
He'll not disdain thee in thy lowly death,  
So—on the twilight air  
I cast thee from me to his fond caress,  
He'll waft thee on to perfect happiness!

E. H. DAVIDSON.

# TEA-TABLE TALK.—BY AMY KEN.

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A Trip to the New Forest.  
The Story of Sir Bevis.  
Lyndhurst.

William the Conqueror.  
"The Queen's House."  
"The Trusty Servant."

 N the third morning after their arrival at Southampton, Miss Ken and her nieces were up with the lark, had a substantial luncheon packed in a hamper, and looked anxiously for the private omnibus which was to convey them to parts of the New Forest; and whilst they were waiting, Helena begged their aunt would tell them a little about Arcupart, the giant, and Sir Bevis, whose figures she said seemed to haunt them, for they could not enter the town for any little shopping without passing through the "Bar" and viewing them.

"Well, in the time of Charles II. this Arcupart, who is said to have measured seven feet five inches in height, with huge shoulders and a ponderous head, was somehow imported into what was called 'Hamptoune' from Norway. He was the terror of the neighbourhood, built himself a hut in a wood, and sallied out at night, levying black-mail upon all with whom he came in contact, sometimes boldly walking into lone houses and carrying off what he pleased. Sir Bevis was a bold knight, and he determined to conquer the giant or die. He could not follow him, as a knight should, on horseback, because of the fastnesses of the forest, so he determined to go alone and on foot to Arcupart's hut, and there await his coming. They fought long without other weapons than their own fists, wrestling, and so forth. Eventually Sir Bevis conquered, and the giant became his 'knafe' and follower. His giant nature, however, broke forth again; and during the absence of his master, he carried off 'Josyan the Brighte,' wife of Sir Bevis. The latter, enraged to the extreme, called together several of his brother-knights to assist him in the search for his lost wife. Two of these met the giant on their way and killed him, bringing home the wife to her grief-stricken husband. Sir Bevis after this lived long, 'in his c<sup>n</sup> castell,'

'Of Hamptoune all the baronage  
Came and did Sir Bevis homage.'

He is now of greate myghte,  
Beloved both of kyng and knyghte,  
Eche man, both erle and baron,  
Loved and dread Bevis of Hamptoune.'

But as I see the omnibus approaching, I may merely say in conclusion that after numberless adventures he, his wife Josyan, and his horse Arundel, died on the same day; but when you get back to London,

send to the library for Sir Henry Ellis's 'Romances,' where you will find an amusing analysis of the story. I think it has been recently published at full length by the Maitland Club."

All were now too excited in taking their seats in the omnibus and looking after their packages, which included camp stools hired for the occasion, as Miss Ken did not believe in sitting on the grass in the way of ordinary "picnickers," as she considered colds were frequently caught by that means, when it had puzzled the victims to know what had caused them. The party are, however, off, and soon arrive at Lyndhurst, on the borders of the New Forest, Miss Ken observing—

"Here you see as ample and as wide woodlands as in the much-admired forests of Germany; and yet because they are so near home, perhaps, we think nothing about them, but travel abroad to discover lesser grandeur. These remarkable woods have a vaster space than you imagine, yet look as far as the eye can carry you, and there is nothing visible but trees; and clothed as they are now, at this season of the year, in rich foliage, you see every variety of hue. Would you believe it, to pass round the whole forest, you would have to travel sixty miles?"

"Was this always a forest, aunt?" asked Annie.

"No, my dear; you ought to know that William the Conqueror was the creator of the New Forest. It was he who first placed this vast tract of wooded country under the severe restrictions of the Norman forest laws, and extended its limits so as to increase the whole extent of land between the Southampton estuary in the east and the southern Avon on the west. The popular story that Cromwell destroyed fifty churches, uprooted numerous villages, and exterminated their inhabitants, is doubtless an exaggeration; for, according to the best authorities, the very qualities of the Forest soil disprove it. Its 'hungry uplands and marshy valleys' could never have been smiling pastures or golden corn-fields. But enough of misery and desolation followed the enforcement of the forest laws to load the memory of the author with imperishable odium; and there are evidences in the names of certain localities of the existence of churches and strongholds which the Conqueror swept away. The name Lyndhurst is derived

from the linden or lime-tree' wood ; and this hamlet has more than once been given a place in the records of historical events. You see before you that homely mansion ; it has no very great pretensions, yet it is called the ' Queen's House,' and here the Forest Courts are held and forest business generally transacted. George III. spent a week here on his way to Weymouth in 1789, and it is the Lord Warden's residence when that dignitary pays an occasional visit to the Forest. Let us enter ; we can see the interior by paying a small gratuity. There are some stags' heads, I find, and no doubt some ancient sportsman had these placed here as trophies of their skill in the hunting field."

" But," said the attendant, " you do not observe the greatest curiosity — William Rufus's stirrup-iron, which that king used in his last fatal chase. You will see in the visitors' book some lines written by a gentleman a few years ago."

Miss Ken turned over the leaves of the antique book, and read as follows :—

" And still in merry Lyndhurst Hall  
Red William's stirrup decks the wall,  
Who lists the sight may see."

When speaking to her pupils on their return from the Queen's House, Miss Ken said she was certain she had heard these lines before, but when and where she could not remember. However, she had to acknowledge that the stirrup looked like a very ancient relic. Taking their seats again in the omnibus, Aunt Ken ordered the driver to make his way to " The Trusty Servant." The man evidently understood the order ; but Miss Ken would not for the moment reveal the meaning of the mysterious words. Passing about a mile in a north-easterly direction, the driver, who had evidently been accustomed to point out to visitors the most beautiful spots, suddenly halted, and the scenery of the Forest was opened to the visitors in all its richness, beauty, and individuality just at the entrance into the village of Minstead, whence they proceeded ; and when they stopped at the inn-door the young ladies one and all exclaimed, " Oh, I see, this is ' The Trusty Servant ! ' " Such, indeed, was the sign, which was not only shown by a man in antique clothing, but a written inscription gave the text in large letters. The horses were taken out of the omnibus to have their bait, and Miss Ken conducted her pupils to the ancient church, which lies in a deep, leafy hollow ; and availing themselves of their camp-stools and the umbrageous boughs of a stately elm, she read the following description of this village, written by William Howitt :—

" On one side," he says, " are open knolls and woodlands, covered with majestic beeches, and the village children playing under them ; on the other the most rustic cottages, almost buried in the midst of their orchard trees, and thatched—as Hampshire cottages alone are, in such projecting abundance, such flowing lines. The whole of the cottages thereabout are in equal taste to the roof—so different to the red, staring, square brick-houses of the manufacturing districts. They seem, as no doubt they are, erected in the spirit and under the influence of the *genus loci*. The beehives in their rustic rows, the little crofts, all belong to a primitive country. I went on, now coming to small groups of such places, now to others of superior pretensions, but equally blest with the spirit of the surrounding nature—little paradises of cultivated life. As I advanced, heathery hills stretched away on the one hand, woods came down thickly and closely on the other ; and a winding road beneath the shade of large old trees conducted me to one of the most retired and peaceful of hamlets. It was Minstead. Herds of red deer rose from the ferns, and went bounding away, and dashed into the depths of the woods ; troops of squirrels in hundreds scampered away from the ground where they had been feeding. Delighted with the true woodland wildness and solemnity of beauty, I roved onwards through the wildest woods that came in my way. Awaking, as from a dream, I saw far around me one deep shadow, one thick and continuous roof of boughs, and thousands of hoary boles straitly clothed, as it were, with the very spirit of silence. I admired the magnificent sweep of some grand, old trees, as they hung into a glade or ravine, or the grotesqueness of some particular trees, which seemed to have been blasted into blackness and contorted into crookedness by the savage genius of the place."

" Now you have seen the cottages and the gardens, you have seen the Forest at a distance, I mean to take you through the shady walks, and you will see the same grandeur of nature as Howitt has pictured, you will see the squirrels in quite as large numbers now as then ; but you will not see the deer, for they have recently been taken out of this part of the Forest. I said, however, that I would endeavour to show the spots where the surroundings corroborate history. You saw William Rufus's stirrup. I intend to show you where he was killed."

" Tell us whether a record remains," said Helena.

" Yes ; on a subsequent occasion I will ask you to copy the tablets which I now introduce to your notice."

## FAMOUS MEN AND WOMEN.

### MRS. GLADSTONE.

THE name of Mrs. Gladstone would be highly respected throughout the length and breadth of this land if it were only as an example to wives and mothers of what women can accomplish in making happy homes, and how genuine devotion to a husband and children will assuredly make a family united in the firmest bonds of friendship. But in every walk of life Mrs. Gladstone has placed her own "footprints on the sands of time." As the devoted wife of the Premier of England she has watched by her husband's bedside when the doctors feared his malady would be fatal; never despairing, however, she has kept vigil through the tedious hours of night until a change came for the better, and with soft steps she has reached the outer door to communicate these hopeful signs; and then, when restoration came, she has been his quiet, devoted attendant during convalescence, lest a relapse might come. But in addition to this, Mrs. Gladstone's benevolent institutions for the poor—self-initiated and almost sustained through her influence—warrant her in having an important niche in the Temple of Fame.

Catherine Gladstone is the eldest daughter of Sir Stephen Glynne, Bart., of Hawarden Castle, Flintshire; and in 1839 all through the St. Asaph district an immense sensation was created—the Squire of Hawarden's two daughters were both to be married on the same day, the one to William Ewart Gladstone, Esq., and the other to Lord Lyttelton. The rejoicings were kept up for several days, but there were many tears shed by those "Miss Catherine had protected, lest they might never again have her consolations in trouble and her congratulations in prosperity; for Mrs. Gladstone has ever been one of those who cry "Never despair!" and when she finds that temporary relief may restore the fallen ones to their lost position, she is ever ready to give a helping hand.

That Mrs. Gladstone takes a vast interest in politics is apparent to every one; for she knows her husband's great ability—she, better than any one else, knows that though the world may think he often errs as a diplomatist, his whole mind is fixed upon passing the most beneficial laws for the general welfare of the people. During her husband's memorable Midlothian campaign she was ever by his side to cheer him on to victory; and when the great demonstration was made at Leeds, and her son was returned for that important town, Mrs. Gladstone was there, and, with a mother's natural love for and pride in a

son, she was almost overwhelmed with joy.

In domestic life, however, Mrs. Gladstone shines to most advantage. Her husband may have many political opponents who would say the most bitter things against him, but if they are permitted to meet his wife in Society they bow with deference to one of the most exemplary women of the day. She has had eight children, all of whom are now alive, except the second son. The eldest, Mr. W. H. Gladstone, represents East Worcestershire, and the youngest son, Mr. Herbert Gladstone, who seems to have had his father's mantle placed upon his shoulders, is one of the representatives of Leeds, and some day or other may be considered as eloquent as his parent. Another son, the Rev. Stephen Gladstone, is Rector of Hawarden, and very highly esteemed amongst all classes of society. Thus it would seem that the example of parents in this family has been followed, and all do credit to their origin.

When Sir Stephen Richard Glynne died he was succeeded by his son, Sir Stephen, as the possessor of the Hawarden estates, who, determining himself not to marry, begged his sister would take the management of the Castle; and here Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone located themselves with their family, and the people on the estate were delighted once again to be visited by their old friend. It was then that Mrs. Gladstone exhibited how deeply interested she was in the moral and social condition of the people around her, especially of the poor. As to the rural population of Hawarden, she thought they wanted culture, and she commenced by a simple system of education tending to their moral and physical elevation and their spiritual progress, with the idea of taking their thoughts away from, prejudicial habits, and to concentrate them upon something pleasing and profitable. Thus she turned her attention to cottage gardening, and with others' aid in addition to her own means, she was enabled to offer prizes for the best-cultivated gardens, for the best outdoor flowers, and for the neatest homes. This excited a spirit of emulation in the minds of the people; their condition improved, and there soon became a marked change in their lives, and that for the better. A few years ago Mrs. Gladstone's brother died, leaving no male heir; and by his will the large estate of Hawarden was settled on his sister and her eldest son, and the inhabitants are indeed fortunate in retaining such a friend near to them.

For many years past Mrs. Gladstone's

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MRS. GLADSTONE.

kindly sympathies have been extended to the dwellers in large cities who have none of the advantages of air and sunshine, trees and flowers, such as flourish so beautifully at Hawarden. For her own sex Mrs. Gladstone has ever exercised considerable sympathy, and has always been first and foremost in any effort made to exalt their position. Thus in London she has supported such benevolent movements as "Homes for Working Girls," "Convalescent Homes," "Hospitals," and other institutions for the relief of the sufferings or the amelioration of the condition of the people. One of the kindest acts she ever did, perhaps, was to go herself to Manchester when the "Cotton Famine" was at its maximum, and import as many starving men as possible to Hawarden Castle, where she employed them in making new roads and paths in the park. Beyond this, however, she invited a number of starving girls, whose growing frames required good food, to Hawarden, and made these become the nucleus of establishing an Industrial Home for Distressed Lancashire Girls; and many women, now mothers of families, have to thank Mrs. Gladstone for preserving them through that cruel ordeal. These efforts were made through the agency of her brother, Sir Stephen Glynne.

But now the cries of the London poor reached her ears, and she asked herself what she could do to alleviate their distress. She was told of miserable creatures dying in the street for want of shelter, and she went round to her friends in 1864, and by collecting £1,000 from ten subscribers, of whom her husband was one, she set on foot the "Night Refuge" in Newport Market, Soho, which still exists, and has under the same roof a school for boys connected therewith. In her first programme Mrs. Gladstone says: "This is to be a night refuge for the homeless, with a special view of inquiry into the character of the inmates, and to provide for their ultimate good, and a school for orphans and destitute children." How many poor creatures have by this institution been saved from degradation no one can tell, but those who are recipients of the charity come away with a better feeling towards their superiors. Whilst at other places the poor and miserable are told to look on the ground and see their own humiliation, here they are told to look up and take courage.

The following letter, written by Mrs. Gladstone to the *Times* in 1880, will sufficiently prove the deep interest she still takes in this institution. On June 16th she writes thus to the Editor:—

"Will you kindly give me a place in your valuable paper to plead the cause of that excellent charity, the Newport Market

Refuge and Industrial School? Sixteen years ago your powerful advocacy was chiefly instrumental in assisting us to found the Newport Market Refuge, the work of which has gone on quietly and unceasingly to this day. The conditions have somewhat altered since that date, owing to changes in the law; but the institution continues to do good work among a class which neither casual wards nor Board schools can exactly provide for. We can have no better test of the work than the fact that we are in cordial co-operation with the Charity Organisation Society; we find places for the boys of our schools, not only readily, but faster than they can be supplied. The Newport Market boys have made themselves a name as musicians to the regimental bands, specially honourable for good conduct and good training. It will be sad indeed that such an institution should close for want of funds. Alas! we are almost at a standstill. Many of our old subscribers have fallen off. I appeal specially, therefore, to the old friends who helped to start the work, and to new friends. Let them only visit the building in Newport Market and judge for themselves. I am sure then I shall have not appealed in vain."

In 1866 Mrs. Gladstone was again to the fore, when cholera broke out in London. She then established an orphan home at Clapton for those children whose parents had died of cholera, and likewise a convalescent home for adults and children recovering from the epidemic.

This philanthropic lady has always one great point in view—that it is no use sending out a poor, weak instrument to accomplish labour; let your working material be first strong and you will save many a patched and broken instrument which costs more in the mending than if it had been welded strong at first. With this New it was that she established a Convalescent Home for the poor, and more especially for the East of London, free of cost. On her own responsibility she established the first at Snaresbrook, but this has since been removed to Woodford Hall, Essex, where during the last fifteen years it has benefited thousands of persons. Its benefits are extended to convalescents from hospitals, or from their own homes, free of cost. It is open to persons of all religious denominations, and there is no system of privileged tickets, admission being determined solely by the merits of the case. A very great deal of good has been done by this convalescent home; but Mrs. Gladstone is left in a great measure to fight her own battle, she does not receive that support from the wealthy that would be anticipated.

# VERSCHOYLE TOWERS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "ARCHIE'S INHERITANCE," "DORIS," "HONOUR REDEEMED," ETC.

## CHAPTER I.



would occupy in the *menage*. That it should not be a menial one was the only stipulation she had made when answering the advertisement in the *Times* which had resulted in her coming.

So far as external appearance went she might not have been deemed a very capable person for thus commencing life on her own responsibility—those small white hands of hers had evidently been little accustomed to work ; and her whole bearing, from the crown of her sunny brown head to the tip of her slender foot, bore upon it so unmistakably the stamp of "gentlewoman" that one could only wonder at the circumstances which had forced her to accept a social position so much lower than that to which she might of right have laid claim.

The facts, however, were simple enough : her father had been an officer who had retired on half-pay, and what little hoard of savings had disappeared under the extravagant demands of his son by a former marriage, Edward Neilson, who had been brought up as an engineer, but had seemingly deserted his legitimate profession for that of a betting-man, a frequenter of races—in a word, an adventurer of the most reckless type, whom his father had found it impossible to reclaim, and had therefore left to his own devices, while he took his little daughter to the Continent, where he imagined his slender income would go farther than at home. The result of this had not been altogether favourable for Maggie, inasmuch as it cut her off from all intercourse with her kindred, who—for the most part wealthy people—had, to say the truth, manifested little interest in their needy relatives ; and Major Neilson, who was of a very proud



MAY evening, warm and dewy, and odorous with the fresh sweetness of early spring flowers : the sun setting behind Verschoyle Towers, and adding a warmth, usually lacking, to the rugged grey stones of which it was composed—the long avenue of chesnuts in all the brave array of their delicate green garments and spiral columns of blossom, scattering perfume with the pink-tinted petals that every now and then came showering down.

This was the scene upon which Maggie Neilson gazed from the window of the rickety old fly that was conveying her to her new home, Verschoyle Towers, whither she was going in the capacity of lady-help, housekeeper's assistant, or whatever other name might be given to the nondescript sort of position she

temperament, would have cut off his right hand rather than apply to them for assistance in any of his difficulties. He had contrived to instil his own sentiments into the mind of his daughter, and they took root in a very kindly soil, for Maggie's nature was in its very essence independent; and when after the sudden death of her father she found herself cast on her own resources, she lost no time in looking out for some means of gaining a livelihood.

She had, of course, written her step-brother news of Major Neilson's decease, but receiving no reply to her letters, had concluded—and rightly—that they had never reached him. When she came to London she went to the address Edward had given, and found that it was only the place to which part of his correspondence was directed, and the people there could give her no information as to his actual residence, but surmised he must be out of town, as it was so long since he had called, and there were some letters still awaiting him. Upon this, Maggie, finding she had no one but herself to depend on, had answered the advertisement before referred to; and her references proving all that could be desired, Mrs. Wakefield, the housekeeper at the Towers, had engaged her, and arranged that she should come as soon as possible.

She was on the look-out for her this evening; and as the cab drove up to the entrance Maggie saw a somewhat portly but ladylike woman of about sixty standing on the steps, which she descended in order to give a kind greeting to her young assistant, whom she at once conducted to the apartment which was to be hers—a pretty, light-looking room, furnished with chintz-covered chairs and curtains, and with two windows that looked towards the west. Here Mrs. Wakefield left her, but soon returned and accompanied her downstairs to her own sitting-room, where they were to have tea, and which was redolent with the perfume of lilac and laburnum that came in through the open casement; and then the housekeeper proceeded to explain what Maggie's duties would be.

"You see, my dear, I am not quite so young as I used to be," she said, attracted by Maggie's sweet young face, and dropping at once into a familiar tone with her. "I can't get about quite so well as I did, so I suggested to Mr. Verschoyle that I should find some one trustworthy to come and help me in various little ways that a servant could not fulfil, and he at once agreed. You understand the house is full of china, and knick-knacks, and those sort of things, to the dusting of which I have

had to attend myself, as the domestic staff is so small; but now I shall hand the charge of them to you. I'll take you over the place directly you have finished tea."

Which she did, and was much gratified by Maggie's appreciation of its various beauties and art treasures—an appreciation which she was shrewd enough to know was something more than mere surface-admiration, such as might have been given by any chance visitor whose eye was gratified by rich colour and graceful proportion; for Maggie Neilson was an artist to her very finger-tips. She could not fail to be happy here, she thought to herself, where one of her duties would be to attend to these lovely *objets de vertu*, and where she would be free to wander at will in grounds that, seen dimly in the dusk, seemed to her as beautiful as they were extensive.

When the morning came, however, and she was enabled to look at them by daylight, she saw they had suffered a good deal by neglect; and Mrs. Wakefield remarked with a sigh that money was not as plentiful as it might be at Verschoyle Towers, which was the reason that its master had cut down his establishment to its present scanty proportions. Considering the size of the house, there were certainly very few servants; and Maggie found, after a day or two, that her own position was no sinecure: there were plenty of things for her to do, and she, being active and industrious, did them so well that Mrs. Wakefield could only congratulate herself on the treasure she had obtained. She, on her part, showed every kindness and consideration for the girl, and allowed her a liberty that was never abused; and in time a very cordial esteem sprang up between the two.

Maggie managed in a very little while to acquaint herself with the ins and outs of the Towers, thinking it better to do so while she had the chance, for when Mr. Verschoyle came home—he was away on the Continent now—she regretfully anticipated a very considerable clipping of her wings, and knew she would not be able to roam about at will as she did at present. She had seen his portrait in the picture gallery—a man of about thirty, with a face not exactly handsome, but expressive of such force, determination, and above all such a consciousness of power, that the eye after once resting on it involuntarily turned to look again, and when finally averted impressed upon the memory a haunting remembrance of its characteristics.

Some little time after her arrival she had an answer from her step-brother to a letter

she had written, in which she explained her position, and concluded with the assurance that she was very happy in the life she had adopted. Edward, in his reply, highly commended her laudable pride of spirit, while regretting that he had not received the news of his father's death until after her plans had been matured ; and Maggie gave a little smile at the insinuation this sentence conveyed.

One morning, about a month after her installation at the Towers, Mrs. Wakefield told her that she had had a letter from Mr. Verschoyle to say he would be home in a few days or a week, and ordering his rooms to be got in readiness.

"I suppose the house will be much livelier when Mr. Verschoyle is here?" said Maggie.

"It is not at all likely," rejoined Mrs. Wakefield, shaking her head. "Mr. Verschoyle is one of the proudest men on the face of the earth, and doesn't care to exhibit his poverty before people—poverty that the last owner of the place, his uncle, brought about by his reckless extravagance. Ever since Mr. Eugene came into the property, now some three years ago, he has been trying his best to cut down his expenses in order to pay off the mortgages ; but I'm afraid it's as much as he can do to manage the interest, which of itself comes to a very tolerable income. I don't know if I have told you that his inheriting the Towers at all was, if one may say so, accidental, his two elder brothers having died within a year, a little while before their uncle."

Two days after this conversation took place Maggie set out for the village to post some letters, and having nothing to do when she came back, did not hurry on her return, but loitered leisurely along a path that led through a field where the long, juicy grass had grown knee-deep, and the scent of wild roses and eglantine and meadow-sweet wafted to her as she walked on in a state of quiet, dreamy content, born of the sense of youth within her, and the calm landscape beauties by which she was surrounded. She paused as she came to a stile—a few rails thrown across the path between two immense elms—and leant her arms on the topmost bar, while she looked round at the sunset scene and at the meadow beyond, all bathed in the slanting golden light—so still and solemn that she might have exclaimed, with Gray—

'The world is left to darkness and to me.'

But such was not exactly the case, and a moment afterwards she became aware that the solitude was less complete than she

had supposed—a whiff of cigar-smoke was wasted to her nostrils, and then a man appeared from the other side of the tree, against which he had been leaning, concealed from her view by reason of the enormous girth of the trunk. He was rather a tall man, with a dark, intellectual face and very keen grey eyes—eyes that opened wide in apparent astonishment as they rested on the idyllic tableau before him : a girl in the fair flush of dawning womanhood standing at a stile, with the glory of the sunset about her, and the blushes rising to her face as her reverie was thus broken in upon.

She uttered a faint exclamation as she saw him, startled at the sense of familiarity his face gave her, and wondering where she could have met him before ; while he, after a momentary indecision, slightly raised his hat, and was about to pass on, when she suddenly prevented him.

"I beg your pardon, but it would be unwise of you to venture through that meadow—there is a bull there, and he is dangerous at times," she said, not without some timidity at thus addressing a stranger.

He turned round at once and came towards her.

"Indeed!" he said, and there was the faint dawn of a smile about his lips. "I am obliged to you for telling me, otherwise I might have had an unpleasant encounter. I must get to the Towers by the longer way, through the park."

To the Towers ! Then this could be none other than Mr. Verschoyle himself, and it was his likeness to his picture that had struck her. She drew back for him to cross the stile, and he, vaulting lightly over it, landed himself at her side.

"I am afraid you will think my interference very uncalled for," she said, the colour flaming into her cheeks, as she nervously clasped her hands together ; "but when I spoke I thought you were a stranger to the neighbourhood."

"And may I ask what has induced you to alter your opinion?" a smile at her evident embarrassment lighting up the depths of his dark eyes.

"Because I think I have recognised you—you are Mr. Verschoyle?"

He bowed acquiescently. "As I don't carry my name written in my face, and as I am quite sure I have never seen you before—if I had, I should not fail to remember the occasion—I am still at a loss to account for your recognition."

He waited for her reply, but it did not come. A sudden overwhelming sense of humiliation had swept over Maggie at the

thought that the tone she had adopted towards Mr. Verschoyle in this short interview had been one of perfect equality, whereas she should have remembered the position she occupied in his household was that of dependence—a fact which in all their intercourse ought never to be forgotten.

Although he could not, of course, divine the meaning of the pained expression which came on her face, and made her eyes droop beneath his gaze, he saw that his question disquieted her; and in spite of the desire he really felt to know who this pretty, graceful girl, alone in his grounds at this time of the evening, could be, he restrained his curiosity and made no further effort to induce her to speak.

"I thank you again for your kind warning," he said, with a reassuring courtesy, and raising his hat once more, took the path leading to the park, and walked rapidly away, leaving Maggie restlessly angry with herself—for what reason she could hardly have told.

"Why did I not say outright who I was, and how it was I knew him?" she murmured impatiently. "Oh, foolish, foolish pride that shut my lips!" Still she determined not to return home until Mr. Verschoyle had had time to reach the Towers; and in pursuance of this resolution resumed her old attitude, and tried to take up the thread of her musings at the point where it had been broken off; but the attempt was worse than useless. Outwardly the scene was just the same—the sunset colours were as glorious, the birds' low notes as sweet, the whole landscape as fair and serene, nevertheless a new element seemed to have entered them all, and to have produced a change, too subtle for analysis even when its results were most apparent. Somehow, Maggie could no more feel herself in perfect unison with the fragrant quietude of the summer evening—its harmony no longer awoke an answering chord in her own breast; and at last she turned half angrily away, and retraced her steps homewards.

## CHAPTER II.

HE next morning Maggie pursued her avocations as usual, and, according to her custom, went through the reception-rooms, a little feather broom in her hand, with which she took the dust off the vases of Dresden and Sèvres china, and the other beautiful and rare articles scattered so profusely about. In one corner of the farthest room stood a pedestal, on which was placed an ex-

quisite copy in white marble of the Venus de Milo, about half the size of the original statue; and the girl paused before this mutilated but goddess-like beauty—the supreme effort of the sculptor's art—and forgetful of everything save her intense appreciation of its loveliness, stood gazing at it with her hands behind her back. So absorbed was she in her contemplation that she did not hear the door pushed open, or notice the entrance of Mr. Verschoyle, who was on the point of advancing, but stopped short, and stood in silent astonishment at an apparition for which he could in no wise account. One glance was sufficient to convince him that the slender, gracefully poised figure, half bending forward, did not belong to a servant; while the duster still in her hand, and the neat holland apron tied round her dress, proved that she could not be a visitor looking over the house—even if the early hour had not precluded such an idea.

Mr. Verschoyle was more than puzzled—he felt curious; and after a few seconds' quiet study, and the thought that she looked singularly in keeping with her surroundings, he came nearer, and pushed aside a chair in order that the noise might attract her attention. She turned round hastily, and he immediately recognised her as the girl he had spoken to the preceding evening; while she, on her part, was overcome with a confusion that was, as a rule, wholly foreign to her nature, and by reason of its novelty all the more difficult to conquer. Nevertheless it was she who recovered herself, and spoke first.

"Do you wish to stay in the room, sir?" she said, her voice such a curious mixture of pride and humility that he could not fail to notice it. "If so, I will leave at once."

"Pray don't let me disturb you," he answered courteously, but looking at her in a bewilderment that her manner only served to increase. "Would it be a rudeness to ask whom I have the honour of addressing?" he added, after a slight pause.

"My name is Margaret Neilson; I assist Mrs. Wakefield in her duties," she replied, letting her eyes rest on the floor, and never daring to raise them to see how he received this intelligence.

"Assist Mrs. Wakefield!" he repeated, in an accent of surprise. "You surely—Pardon me"—breaking off abruptly—"I was not aware that you were an inmate of the Towers, although I now remember that Mrs. Wakefield informed me she had secured a companion."

His astonishment was evidently so great

that he could not quite realise the situation and felt himself, in consequence, some what embarrassed. Quick-witted Maggie observed this, and recovering her entire self-possession, advanced towards the door for the purpose of quitting the apartment.

"You need not leave, Miss Neilson; only came in to get a book," said Mr. Verschoyle, quickly. "I suppose you were arranging the vases?"

"I was dusting them, sir."

"Then pray go on with your dusting, if you please," he said, with a smile; and taking an album from one of the tables he bowed slightly and went downstairs. Arrived there, he rang the bell for Mrs. Wakefield, and when she came in questioned her closely concerning the household, contriving to bring the conversation round to Maggie in a manner that seemed perfectly natural to the housekeeper, who soon parted with all her information on the subject, and was loud in her praises of the treasure she had found. He received her encomiums very quietly, and soon she left him sitting musing in his study—an apartment fitted up with bookshelves, and used by him both as library and sitting-room.

Here he spent most of his time, and Maggie found that his presence made very little difference in the general arrangements of the house, for he seldom went out, and received visitors even less rarely; indeed, he seemed to shun rather than seek society, and lived a life that was singularly monotonous and unexciting, considering he was still so young a man. Moreover, this seclusion was entirely voluntary on his part, for continual efforts were made by his neighbours to withdraw him from it, and induce him to share the gaieties which were going on in the vicinity.

It was very seldom that Maggie saw him—occasionally in the evening she would meet him in the grounds as he was walking along in the twilight, apparently deep in meditation, and he would raise his hat or bid her "Good-night" as he passed on; and oftentimes as she was going to bed she would lean out of her window and see the slanting reflection of the light that burned in his study lying across the stone terrace that ran along the front of the house. It used to burn for many hours, that light: sometimes the dawn would come in, and make it look yellow and garish before its white purity, and then Mr. Verschoyle would wearily rise and extinguish it, and afterwards sit down again, and go on with his former employment of bending over the drawings that littered his writing-table.

Maggie frequently used to wonder what it was that he pored over so continually, and that was even allowed to rob him of his rest; but when she mentioned her curiosity to the housekeeper, Mrs. Wakefield hazarded the reply, "Books," and evidently had no more tangible knowledge on the subject than Maggie herself.

The only form of recreation Mr. Verschoyle permitted himself was riding, and horses appeared to be his solitary extravagance. He was passionately fond of them, and although he was too poor to afford an extensive stud, the few animals in his stables were invariably good ones.

"I don't like that fresh creature, Lady Maud," said Mrs. Wakefield one morning to Maggie, alluding to a horse Mr. Verschoyle had just driven off in his dog-cart. "I'm sure she has a vicious temper—those chestnuts with white feet generally come to grief, I've noticed."

Events rather tended to justify this sapient opinion, for in the evening Mr. Verschoyle returned with a badly sprained wrist, the result of his endeavours to hold in Lady Maud, who had seen fit to bolt during the drive, and had all but overturned the cart—a feat she would inevitably have succeeded in accomplishing if she had been under the management of a less-experienced Jehu.

Mrs. Wakefield, on hearing of the accident, hurried to the study with many expressions of sympathy and commiseration. "It is badly sprained, too," she said, as she bound it up, after applying some lotion. "I'm afraid it will be a few days before you'll be able to use it, sir."

"Good heavens! no—I hope not!" he exclaimed, in some irritation. "What, in the name of goodness, am I to do with my correspondence? You must act as my amanuensis, Mrs. Wakefield."

"My sight is not good enough, sir; otherwise I would with pleasure," she returned. "Let me see," pondering, "Miss Neilson could write your letters if you want any to go to-night."

"I do want some to go—particularly," he said, with a slight hesitation, and nittting his brows together. "But—oh, ever mind!" and he seemed to dismiss an objection that had mentally presented itself. "Ask Miss Neilson to do me the favour to come in."

Miss Neilson, therefore, came in, very pleased at the idea of making herself useful; and after Mr. Verschoyle had apologised for thus troubling her, she sat down to the table and wrote what he dictated in clear, large hand that was more like a man's than a woman's, and challenged his

admiration. As a matter of fact, he did not hurry over the correspondence, for he would have been more than man if he had not enjoyed sitting opposite this fair young girl, and watching the changes in her expressive face, and the sunlight shadows playing amongst the brown wealth of her rippling hair. She was very young—a mere child compared with himself; therefore there could be neither harm nor danger in his admiring her, especially as he did so from an abstract point of view, much with the same kind of admiration he might have bestowed on a fine picture or statue—this is what he would have said had any one questioned him on the subject, and yet he was not a sophist.

When Maggie had finished the last epistle—they were all business ones—she rose from her seat. “I am going into the village presently with some letters of my own—would you like me to post these, sir?” she asked, in the quietly respectful tone she had adopted towards him.

“I should be glad if you would; they are rather important ones, and I wish to be assured of their safety,” he replied, and rose to open the door for her to go out.

Half an hour later she was walking along the avenue in the park under the shadow of the chestnuts, which were no longer covered with snowy pyramids of blossom as they had been on her arrival, but through the rifts in whose boughs bars of sunlight were making their way in long slanting beams, that flickered and shifted on the turf below, as a faint breeze stirred the leaves and sent a shivering chord of music whispering amongst them. Maggie went along with a pleased smile hovering about her lips—she had of late found her life so quiet and uneventful that even the small excitement of writing a letter for Mr. Verschoyle was a variety, and brought with it a certain sense of pleasurable change, more especially as he had been so courtly and deferential to her, and had not allowed his manner to exhibit the faintest symptom of the difference of position existing between them. What a fine face he had! thought Maggie, recalling to her mental sight a vision of those dark, fathomless eyes that had looked at her so pleasantly, and the toes of a voice that had softened into a marvellous sweetness in addressing her half an hour ago.

Occupied in these reflections, the walk to the village seemed very short, and coming back, she chose the more circuitous route home, through a plantation that extended some distance beyond the park—a plantation where, just now, “Heaven seemed upbreaking through the earth,” as

the Laureate has quaintly said; and, indeed, the poetical conceit was no extravagance when applied to the profusion of wild hyacinths here nodding their blue bells to the summer evening. Maggie stayed to gather some, and filled her hands so full that, secure of no one seeing her, she took off her hat and made an impromptu basket to carry her floral treasures, and then wove a wreath of the sweet-scented blossoms, and, with a childish pleasure, crowned herself. Presently she came to a little rustic bridge thrown across a narrow stream, and here she stayed to rest, and leaning over, gazed down into the deep, clear waters, from the surface of which smiled up a graceful, flower-wreathed head that might have belonged to a naiad of the brook.

“Is it the Lorelei?” questioned a voice close beside her, and she started violently as she looked up and perceived Mr. Verschoyle at her side—not looking at her, but with his eyes gravely fixed on the image in the water. “Don’t move,” he said, as she altered her position; “I am an artist, and can appreciate the picture before me.”

She did not quite know whether this was satire—his voice was so quiet, and his manner so earnest, it suggested nothing; nevertheless, the fear that he was laughing at her made her draw hastily backward.

“You have spoiled it all, Miss Neilson!” he exclaimed disappointedly, turning round and leaning his back against the rustic woodwork. “Do you know, when I came upon you first, I thought Undine had risen and garlanded herself to see how much like a wood-nymph she could appear!”

Maggie’s face became crimson as she snatched the wreath from her hair, and with a petulant movement threw it into the water flowing beneath. “Your comparison was a just one, Mr. Verschoyle—you must infer from such an exhibition of apparent vanity that I am as soulless as Undine herself.”

“Do you think so?” smiling a little. “May not a woman look upon her own fairness without vanity?”

“Indeed, indeed, I intended nothing of the sort!” she cried earnestly, tears of vexation springing to her eyes. “It was simply a sudden freak, prompted by some feeling of childishness within me which was irresistible, but which I cannot explain—”

“I understand,” he said gently, and in a tone of kindly reassurance, as he observed her distress. “And now that you have justified yourself—not that there was any necessity for your doing so—let me tell you that you utterly misinterpreted my allu-

sion. However, we will say no more about it. Are you going?" he added, as she put on her hat.

"I must; it is getting late, and it will soon be dark," she stammered in reply.

"It will not be dark at all to-night, for the moon is rising—see!" he stepped a little on one side and pointed upward to where the moon's argent disc was visible, resting in a sky of deep, intense blue. "I am about returning myself, so we can walk back to the Towers together."

Under the circumstances she could not refuse his escort, and, truth to tell, she had no inclination to do so, though Conscience whispered her against permitting herself to feel thus elated at the prospect of Mr. Verschoyle's companionship. However, she said nothing, and they walked home side by side through the dew-wet fields, where the meadow-sweet and great ox-eyed daisies were gleaming white in the moon-shine, and the soft silence of the night was unbroken save by the murmur of the stream and the whispering of the rushes on its margin, or the plaintive note of a tired bird low down in the grass.

They talked during most of the time, or rather Maggie did, for Mr. Verschoyle displayed imitable talent in drawing her out; and somehow she lost the *gêne* and reserve that had hitherto been visible in the small communication she had had with him, and was her true, natural self—bright and charming, with a sweet, half-womanly, half-childish grace that her companion found very fascinating. She had been so long debarred from all society, save that of Mrs. Wakefield—who was neither youthful enough nor appreciative enough to be a companion in the true sense of the word—that to talk with a man comparatively young, undoubtedly intellectual, and who had seen much of the world, and studied human nature in nearly all its varied phases, was in itself a pleasure that would have been incomprehensible to one less shut out from excitement than Maggie; and she, knowing no wiser philosophy, took the goods the gods provided, and let all doubts slip from her as she stepped on the boundary of a new and wondrously fair world.

### CHAPTER III.

**F**THE next day Mrs. Wakefield was confined to her room with a sick headache that proved to be the commencement of a bilious attack of a rather serious nature, so Maggie had to take upon herself the duties of house-keeper as well as nurse and amanuensis to

Mr. Verschoyle, who contrived to keep her employed two or three hours each morning, although, in effect, it was more disinclination than inability which prevented him from undertaking his correspondence himself. Thus it happened that the two saw a good deal of each other—more, in fact, than would have been approved of by Mrs. Wakefield had she been cognisant of it, and more, perhaps, than there was any strict necessity for; but it happened just then that Mr. Verschoyle had all the pictures taken down from the reception-rooms, and finding in Maggie a wonderfully quick intelligence as well as highly developed artistic taste, he got her to assist him in re-arranging and re-hanging them, and in this way they were frequently in each other's society.

Then sometimes in the evening, as she was taking her usual walk, she would meet the master of the Towers; and it became a habit on these occasions for them to saunter along together, idly conversing as they went. So the time passed by, and the promise of the spring ripened into summer, while the meadow-sweet and marguerites no longer blossomed in the long lush grass, but had been mown down in the early dawn, and woven in the tall, sweet-smelling hayricks that had been raised by busy hands for Mr. Verschoyle's winter store.

It was a very happy time for Maggie—a time when, all unconsciously, she was drinking deep draughts of life's sweetest elixir, and laying by a store of memories that even in the bitter after-days could be looked upon with unmixed delight. She did not attempt to analyse her sensations, or to reason why she, but three short months ago so lonely and miserable, and looking forward to no brighter future than a life of dependence, should suddenly awake to find the fair world fairer than of yore, the bounteous summertide fuller of golden promise, her own heart bea ing with a quicker vitality that, like the alchemist's crucible, transmuted to gold all that came within the sphere of its influence.

Oftentimes, when Mr. Verschoyle was out, she would sit at her window, which looked on to the terrace, and peer forth into the darkness until she heard the clatter of his horse's hoofs on the gravelled path, and the ringing echo of his own quick footsteps, as, after dismounting, he paced the terrace in thoughtful meditation, or retired to his library, where the light would burn steadily on for half the night. Naturally these nocturnal studies had no very favourable effect on his health—indeed, he grew in time to look so worn and haggard that Maggie, observing it with those watchful

eyes that followed all the changes in his face with a quiet, solicitous interest, at length summoned up courage to speak to him concerning it. It was one evening when she was employing herself in snapping off the dead blossoms from a rose-tree, Mr. Verschoyle smoking, and idly watching her the while.

"I ought to have gone to Weston today, and taken my seat on the bench," he observed ; "but I felt so tired that magisterial duties were out of the question."

"And no wonder that you feel tired, considering how late it is before you go to bed. However strong a man may be, he cannot sit up until daybreak, and then be perfectly fresh," answered Maggie, colouring at her own boldness.

He looked at her in some astonishment. "And pray how do *you* know what hours I keep?" he asked, after a moment's pause, and smiling as he spoke.

"Because I am a light sleeper, and generally hear you come upstairs," in some embarrassment. "I am afraid you will think it very presumptuous of me to say this," she continued ; "but indeed, Mr. Verschoyle, you look so often weary and dispirited that it is impossible to help noticing it ; and I am willing to risk your displeasure if by calling your attention to the fact it may be altered."

"Weary and dispirited !" he repeated musingly. "I frequently feel both, but it will not be for long—a little more hard work and then my purpose will be achieved, and after that I can afford to rest. Are you wondering what I mean ?" he said, observing her eyes fixed inquiringly on him. "Well, a solution of my enigmatical words shall be given you, and you shall become the partner of a secret that is at present known only to myself."

He waited for a few seconds, pondering, then threw away his cigar. "Take a turn with me down the avenue," he said, in a tone of unconscious command that she never dreamed of disobeying. So taking off her gardening gloves, and leaving them and the scissors and the sweet faded roses all together, she accompanied him to the end of the terrace and into the cool, dense shadow of the chestnuts. Arrived there, he still seemed in no great hurry to speak, but walked slowly along for a few minutes, his brows knitted over thoughtful, sombre eyes that looked straight before them, and only softened as they rested on the slim little figure at his side, whose owner was waiting for the promised explanation. When he commenced giving it, it was in a roundabout fashion.

"You know—or perhaps you *don't* know

—that I was not brought up with any expectation either of becoming a rich man or the master of Verschoyle Towers—the terms are not synonyms," he interpolated, smiling rather grimly—"so that when I found myself my Uncle Geoffrey's heir I was quite unprepared for the sudden change in my fortunes. But although I could not feel otherwise than delighted at being the possessor of my family's ancestral home, my pleasure was considerably lessened by the discovery that my inheritance was so heavily mortgaged as to be, financially considered, a very doubtful acquisition. Nothing can possibly be more wretched than the life of a man whose social position obliges him to keep up appearances that his income is inadequate to support ; and as this situation was mine, I had at one time serious ideas of shutting up the house and continuing my profession, in which I had every prospect of success ; but second thoughts, and the family pride which is said to be dominant in my character, determined me otherwise, and I resolved to accept my position, and in the meantime put into effect a scheme that had been for some time floating in my brain, and the carrying out of which to a successful issue would enable me to repair my shattered fortunes. Now I will tell you what that scheme is." He waited a moment to glance at his hearer, and assure himself of her attention, and, satisfied on this point, continued : "Although I had been educated as a civil engineer, my tastes had always inclined towards mechanism, and from my boyhood up I had frequently occupied myself in putting together complicated pieces of machinery merely for the pleasure the work itself gave me. Some few years ago I had every opportunity of studying the working of the steam-engine, and I saw in it capabilities of wonderful improvement, which, it seemed to me, I myself could effect. Since then I have made myself thoroughly acquainted with its construction and working ; and the result is a nearly completed model of an engine which is, in my opinion, vastly superior to that now in use. This, then, is what has occupied me during those night-watches which have incurred your rebuke."

He smiled down into the animated face lifted to his own while he had been speaking, and which looked wonderfully fair and sweet in the dim light that filtered through the closely-woven chestnut boughs.

"The engine is not quite finished. I have not been able to work at it lately because of my wrist," he continued thoughtfully ; "but I have spent the time in pre-

paring my plans and ideas, and now I think both are fully matured, so that I anticipate no further difficulty than in getting the wooden model cast in iron, after which I shall patent it, and endeavour to get Government to take it up. If I succeed—and success is well-nigh certain—great wealth will be the result. Ah!" he exclaimed, stopping short and looking round, while he involuntarily drew a long, deep inspiration, "if I can only free these lands from their mortgages, and feel no longer the terrible incubus of debt that now weighs me down!"

She did not say anything, although her heart was full to overflowing with sympathy and admiration—but what is deepest felt is ever hardest to express.

"Come," he added, turning round and—almost unconscious in his eagerness of what he was doing—taking her arm to lead her. "Come back with me and I will show you my work."

They retraced their steps, and entering the study by the French window, he took her into another and inner room, that she had never before entered, and of which Mr. Verschoyle himself invariably kept the key. This he evidently used as a workshop, for littered about it was a variety of tools, while on a rough deal table running along one side of the wall lay several plans and drawings, and an almost finished model of an engine.

"Here you see that which represents in the past a great deal of thought, and many hours' labour, and which will, I hope, represent in the future not only riches to its inventor, but utility to the world at large," said Mr. Verschoyle, placing his hand on the model, and leaning over it almost fondly. "You must know that engines are at present worked by a straight up-and-down movement; now I have made this rotary—a thing that has been attempted more than once, but has hitherto failed through some fault of construction that the inventor could not remedy." Then seeing how interested she was, he continued explaining to her the various parts of his machine, avoiding technicalities as much as possible, in order to make himself perfectly intelligible, and as he spoke she could see the pent-up eagerness which possessed him, and the tenacity with which he clung to the hope that had all along encouraged him—that of lifting from the estates the burden his uncle's reckless extravagance had imposed on them.

"In a thing of this kind the greatest secrecy is necessary in order to prevent oneself being forestalled," he said, looking at her as she stood in the sunset's fading

light, with her hands clasped together in her eagerness; "you are the only person to whom I have confided my scheme, and I have so much faith in you that I shall not even ask you not to betray my confidence."

"Indeed, indeed there is no need for you to do so—I would guard it with my life!" she exclaimed, speaking with intense earnestness, and almost below her breath. \*

The following day an event happened for which the inmates of the Towers were all unprepared—a handsome Victoria, drawn by a pair of perfectly matched greys, dashed up the avenue, and therefrom alighted two ladies and a gentleman, who were ushered into the drawing-room, while their cards—upon which were imprinted the several names of Mr., Mrs., and Miss Dundas—were borne to Mr. Verschoyle, who hastened to greet them.

"You see we have taken advantage of your invitation to come and see your art treasures," said the elder lady as he entered, rising and extending her hand with a gracious smile. "We are lucky in finding you at home."

"I should indeed have been unhappy to have missed seeing you," replied Mr. Verschoyle, with a courtly bow; then he proceeded to greet her daughter—a young lady of twenty-one, who for the last two years had held her own as belle of the county—a position which had been conceded her without dispute, not only because she possessed an air of commanding hauteur that always makes itself felt as an influence in society, and that sometimes obtains for its owner the title of "belle" which her personal attractions of themselves do not deserve, but because in addition to this she was so royally handsome that criticism itself dared not attack her. People had said, and did say, many things about her—that she was vain—that she was stupid—that she was obstinate, and various other opinions equally flattering; but not even her ugliest female neighbour had ventured to deny her beauty, and not even the prettiest dared put her own in competition with it.

The family of Dundas lived at a place about two miles away from the Towers, called the Limes, and were Mr. Verschoyle's nearest neighbours. He visited them more frequently than he did any one else, as Mr. Dundas was a fellow-magistrate, and they had many matters of mutual interest to discuss. This, however, was the first time the ladies of the family had appeared under his roof, and they were both most anxious

to be shown all over the Towers—an anxiety expressed chiefly by Mrs. Dundas, who covered her daughter's conversational deficiencies by a very considerable exercise of her own talents. It was not so much that Georgina *could* not talk, as that she *would* not, thinking that if she sat still and looked beautiful she fulfilled in a perfectly praiseworthy manner all the obligations she owed to society.

Mr. Verschoyle was very pleased to gratify his guests' wishes, and himself conducted them over the house; but an event happened upon which he had not calculated, and which certainly did not afford him unlimited satisfaction. Mrs. Dundas's tour of investigation having led her to a little old lumber-room, at the extreme end of the picture-gallery, she there surprised, and was surprised by, Maggie, who, attired in an old holland dress, was seated contentedly on the ground in an attitude which was doubtless very satisfactory to her ideas of comfort, but not, perhaps, equally so to those of dignity. Her employment was that of dusting some old pictures she had managed to disinter from the heap of rubbish with which the room was filled. A moment's startled gaze when the handle turned, a deep blush, and then she hastily recovered her perpendicular as the door opened and disclosed to view Mrs. Dundas and her daughter, followed by Mr. Verschoyle—the two former looking extremely curious, while the face of the latter wore an expression of deep annoyance. The nature of her occupation had not added to Maggie's neatness of appearance, the dust she had dislodged from the pictures having settled on her own hair and dress; nevertheless, that she was a lady could not be doubted, and Mrs. Dundas, perceiving this, turned inquiringly to her host; but before Mr. Verschoyle could speak, Maggie herself had taken the initiative, and making a slight bow, which included the whole company, she slipped quietly from the room through a door at the side.

"We have frightened the lady away," observed Mrs. Dundas, fixing her keen eyes on Mr. Verschoyle, and speaking with a peculiar accent, whose significance he instantly comprehended. "I had no idea any one was in the room, otherwise I would not have entered."

"It is of no consequence; she will have another opportunity of continuing her explorations," he rejoined calmly.

"Then she is staying in the house? I had no knowledge that there was a lady at the Towers."

"Miss Neilson assists my housekeeper," he said shortly, angry at the explana-

tion Mrs. Dundas forced him to give, and inwardly anathematising her ill-bred inquisitiveness.

"She is very young and very pretty," commented the lady, with emphasis; but Mr. Verschoyle, showing no outward sign of the great irritation he was suffering, did not notice her tone, and changed the subject of conversation with a quiet ease characteristic of him; and even Mrs. Dundas's curiosity was not bold enough to enter on ground thus forbidden, so they all went downstairs again and into the flower-garden, which had assumed a very different appearance since the advent of the house-keeper's young assistant, and now, freed from weeds, and with the flowers carefully trained, showed an attention conspicuous in the other parts of the ground by its entire absence.

Maggie saw them here, as she looked out behind the curtains of her bedchamber, whither she had fled after her hasty retreat; and thus gazing at the quartette, her eyes fixed jealously on the tall, graceful figure by whose side Eugene Verschoyle walked, her heart swelled with mortification, and tears of hot bitterness rose to her eyes as she mentally compared the exquisite vision before her with the image of herself she had seen reflected in the glass—a flushed, vexed-looking girl, clothed in a tumbled gown that had certainly seen its best days, and with dusty brown hair straying untidily over her shoulders.

But suddenly Maggie asked herself what right *she* had to feel vexed at seeing Mr. Verschoyle with one of the fair women of his own order, and sat down to consider the question in all its bearings. Poor little beating heart, that would chide itself for a sentiment which was, after all, as natural as to sleep or move! Heretofore she had been content to live her happy life, only conscious of the delight it gave her to be near Eugene Verschoyle, and totally regardless of the *reason* of this pleasure. Indeed, when reflections or doubts had come, she had driven them remorselessly away, thinking that sufficient for the day was the joy thereof, and determining to avail herself of it without consideration of ulterior consequences.

Now, however, jealousy had torn down the thin curtain, which had interposed between her and a knowledge of the truth that both heart and conscience whispered—the truth that she loved him, so wildly, so intensely, so hopelessly, that her future life without him could only be a passionate memory—a vain regret! It was useless endeavouring to blind herself any longer—the fact in its utter madness, its com-

plete, overwhelming consciousness rushed in upon her, bringing with it, at the same time, the richest delight her young life had ever known, and the dreariest sense of despairing misery.

For an hour or two after the people in the garden had passed out of sight, she sat quite still, and at the end of that time she believed she had thoroughly convinced herself of her folly, by a rigorous course of reasoning, which clearly demonstrated the blind, besotted idiocy of which she had been guilty. If common sense had hitherto deserted her, it asserted itself now; and while it told her how impossible it was she and Mr. Verschoyle could ever be anything to each other more than friends—if, indeed, she might aspire thus high—it also counselled an immediate departure from the Towers as the best means of curing herself, and she determined to leave.

Having come to this conclusion, she rose, bathed her eyes, and then went to the window, where she remained standing, watching the twilight deepening to purple dusk, and one single point of starry light quivering far away, up in the summer depths of the blue sky; and although she had a perfect comprehension of its truth, she could only think on the discovery she had just made with a certain dull sense of bewildered pain, as of something new and strange to her.

By-and-by there came a rap at the door, and on opening it she found a servant outside, who had brought a message from Mr. Verschoyle, requesting to see her for a few minutes, so she had no alternative but to obey the summons, and thereupon went down, a shy, nervous consciousness visible in her demeanour.

"You wanted to speak to me, sir?" she said interrogatively, as she entered the study.

"Yes, please sit down"—and he placed a chair for her and took one himself. "How is it you have not watered the flowers to-night, as you usually do?" he asked.

"I forgot them until it was too late," she answered confusedly, and then there was a silence of some moments' duration.

"I am afraid you were disturbed rather rudely this afternoon," he observed at last. "I myself was not conscious you were in the room, otherwise a little more ceremony might have been used in entering it."

"It did not matter, only—I suppose your guests took me for a dusty house-maid!" returned Maggie, trying to speak playfully, but unable to hide the latent irritation of her voice. It had been easy enough in the solitude of her own room to make good resolutions, and determine to

behave in a perfectly calm and unemotional manner, but she was very young, and very unaccustomed to exercising restraint, and nature, with her, had not yet been subdued by artificial conventionalities.

Eugene Verschoyle darted a keen glance at her, and then dropped his eyes in order to hide a slightly amused smile that lurked in them. "You certainly did look *rather* dusty," he admitted gravely—"dusty, and tired, and aggrieved at having your solitude thus broken in upon; nevertheless it is a pity you ran away so hurriedly, for if you had stayed you would have seen a picture—a living picture, much more beautiful than any we have on canvas, and that I am sure would have gratified your artistic instinct."

"You mean Miss Dundas?" said Maggie, bravely conquering a choking sensation in her throat.

"Yes. It is pleasant"—meditatively—"it is pleasant amongst the mediocrity of which the world is chiefly composed, to come across something soaring so far above it that no one dare cast a doubt on its altitude, and by this I mean to say that the most captious critic would not deny Miss Dundas's beauty."

Maggie rather wondered why he should choose to dilate upon it to her; perhaps he had selected Miss Dundas for his future wife and was about telling her so! The sick pain at her heart grew harder to be borne, and, try as she would to prevent it, her face became deadly pale, while her hands involuntarily clasped themselves together over her throbbing bosom.

He noticed all these symptoms, but made no comment. The truth was he also had been putting himself through a self-examination as soon as Mrs. Dundas's words had opened his eyes to the fact that Maggie's position was a somewhat anomalous one, especially since he had claimed so much of her time and companionship; and when he discovered how completely she had come to fill his life and thoughts, a battle—fierce enough while it lasted—had been fought between his pride and his love, and the latter had conquered.

Then came the doubt whether she—so much younger than himself—returned his feelings, and he determined to make an effort to discover this before he openly announced himself as her wooer.

"I am glad you saw enough of Georgina Dundas to appreciate her loveliness," he went on, never letting his eyes stray from her face. "You *did* admire her?"

"Yes."

"You think that the man who married her would have a peerless wife?"

"Yes. She is as beautiful as Titian's Venus, or as a Greek statue, or a poet's dream!" cried Maggie, with blanched lips, desperately determined to give her full meed of praise without letting jealousy or any other unworthy feeling detract from it one iota.

"I am pleased to hear this opinion, because it shows that our tastes still agree," he returned quietly. "Do you know rumour has coupled our names together, and given her to me for a bride?"

Maggie had heard Mrs. Wakefield mention the report, but had treated it as the idlest of idle gossip. She did not reply to Mr. Verschoyle's question.

"I am thinking of resigning my liberty," he went on, in the same tone. "Life alone in this large house, isolated as it is, cannot be otherwise than dull; and besides, I am over thirty—an age when every man who does not desire to die a bachelor should put into effect his matrimonial intentions. What do you say to this resolution on my part?"

She put her hand against a table near which she stood, and turned away her face so that the light should not fall upon it. "What can I say but to congratulate you?" she answered, her voice rather tremulous. "I need not tell you, Mr. Verschoyle, how sincerely I hope you may be happy."

"I do not think there is much fear on that score"—slowly. "I have not selected my future wife without knowing her. I have carefully watched her and seen the indications of her pure spirit in everything she has said, and everything she has done, and I know she is as good and tender as she is fair."

As Maggie listened to him, she tried to picture what the life of the woman to whom he had given his love must become under the influence of such a priceless gift; but even fancy was not potent enough to linn it in colours as bright as it deserved. Perhaps the dark shadows of the lonely destiny she had marked out for herself came between her and imagination and obscured it. She started up, white and trembling—unable to endure any longer the strain put upon her.

"I must leave you, Mr. Verschoyle—I have something to do—important," she said incoherently, and was going towards the door, when he prevented her.

"Don't go, Maggie," he whispered, slipping his arm round her waist, and holding her firmly in his clasp. "I have something to say to you more important than what awaits you outside. Can you guess what it is, darling?"

She turned upon him, her eyes flashing with indignant surprise. "Take your arm away, Mr. Verschoyle! How dare you call me by my Christian name—how dare you insult your future wife by offering me caresses!"

"I don't think I insult her by so doing," he said, clasping her still closer, and bending his face down to hers. "Dearest"—passionately—"do you think anything in the world would induce me to treat you except with respect? Don't you see that I love you with all the strength of which I am capable—that you are to me the purest, sweetest incarnation of womanhood, and that my love will only die when soul and body part?"

She looked at him bewilderedly, her heart thrilling beneath the influence of his words, as her body thrilled under his touch, but her senses hardly able to realise that this precious boon, which she had been well-nigh too despairing to long for, was now thrust into her grasp. Her eyes raised themselves in mute inquiry, and met his—love-lit, passion-filled. Then she doubted no longer, but sank into his arms with a low cry of utter gladness.

#### CHAPTER IV.

 N the afternoon of the next day Georgina Dundas was driving herself in her little pony carriage along the road that led from her own home to the Towers, her only companion a great black retriever that trotted contentedly by the side of the phaeton. The road, although a very pleasant one, was also very unfrequented, the traffic upon it being confined chiefly to market-days, when the cottagers walked and the tenant-farmers jogged along in their ungainly vehicles to the county town, where they vended their butter and eggs, and exhibited samples of their agricultural produce.

On this particular day pedestrianism was confined to one man, who was evidently not a villager—so much was clearly evinced by his easy, swinging gait, and borne out on a nearer view by his attire, which consisted of a light grey summer suit, whose cut proclaimed it the production of a West End tailor. Miss Dundas regarded him somewhat curiously, and as they came near enough to recognise each other, she gave a slight start, and the colour in her cheeks deepened to a vivid crimson as she checked her pony and brought the carriage to a standstill.

"You here!" she exclaimed, as she gave him her hand, which he raised to

his lips. "I had no idea of meeting you this afternoon."

"I kept away as long as I could—I did my best to conquer the impulse that urged me to seek you, and—I failed, therefore I am here," he returned, his eyes fixed on her face in a long and ardent gaze of admiration, before which she neither quailed nor blushed. "Are you glad or sorry to see me?"

"I don't know," she answered, with candour, her expression growing less assured. "It is pleasant to meet you once more, but I don't know that any good will come of it."

"How calm you are—how cold!" he cried, half bitterly. "Now, I, in your presence, can no more doubt than I can reason—I can do nothing but give reins to the ecstasy which runs riot within me whenever I am near you!"

Her eyes softened a little as they dwelt on his face—handsome as Antinous's, and working with the earnestness that prompted the passion of his words; but her troubled look deepened, and she shook her head. "Did I not tell you two months ago that it would be better to forget me—that nothing could come of our love?"

"Do you remember the Danish king who bade the sea advance no farther?" he demanded scornfully. "Well, his mandate was just as likely to be obeyed as yours; and if you had had any measure to gauge the depth of love, you would have known it at the time. But you are a woman, and it is not given you to understand the fervour of a man's passion. I tell you, Georgina, that since the day I saw you first, and held you in my arms as I snatched you from under the horses' feet, I resolved to win you, and I have never swerved from my determination!"

"The day you saved my life!" she said; then, with a deep sigh: "But it is no use talking. You know as well as I do that as things are we can never be more to each other than friends."

"That we shall never be. It must be either more or less," he returned, with decision. "Georgina," imploringly, "I know you care for me as much as you are capable of caring for any one—and that I sometimes think is little enough! Promise to wait for me until I have had time to win money and position. I can do both if I have the thought of you to spur me on!"

"Can you?" she said doubtfully, touched by his words, but weighing them nevertheless. "Fortunes are not so easily made as you fancy, and it seems to me you would be a greater adept at spending than gaining one."

"I may have been in the past, but then it was different, for I had only myself to think of, and cared little what I risked. Now that I have you for an incentive I could do anything."

Just then the sound of a horse's hoofs made them look up, and presently Eugene Verschoyle rode by, raising his hat as he passed, and seeming slightly astonished at the tableau which met his gaze. It was a scorching hot day, the sunshine pouring down in a blinding white radiance from a sky so blue and bright that it almost dazzled the eye to look upon it, and just here, where Miss Dundas had drawn up her pony, there was no friendly screen of trees to intercept the glare; so it became evident that both she and her companion must be considerably interested in a conversation carried on under such circumstances.

"Who is that?" questioned the young man, turning to gaze after him as he rode along the dusty stretch of grass-bordered road.

Georgina Dundas must have deserved, in some measure, the epithet "stupid" bestowed upon her by her acquaintance, for her arrant love of admiration and desire of exhibiting her power made a conscious smile dawn on her lips. "That is Mr. Verschoyle—the man my mother would like me to marry," she said, glancing at her companion from under the shadow of her long lashes.

The look with which he again regarded Verschoyle was not a pleasant one. "Then I am afraid your mother will be disappointed, for I am the man you will marry," he returned, with quiet conviction. "You see even your own coldness does not discourage me, so it is not likely anything else would. I shall only ask of you one thing, namely, that you promise not to engage yourself for two years. Do you consent?"

She paused for a few minutes, pondering. It may be her thoughts ran somewhat in this way: "I am only twenty-one; two years at my age will not be a serious loss—it will neither affect my beauty nor my prospects of matrimony; and besides, I would a thousand times rather marry Edward Nelson than any other man, so I will say 'Yes,'" and she said it.

"I suppose if I could back up my claim with money your parents would not object to me for a son-in-law?" he suggested, after the promise had been given.

"No; on the contrary, they would welcome you, for they know I like you; but as things are at present, nothing would induce them to give their consent, and I

should not marry you without it. If I did no after-penitence would affect them in the least, and they would as soon think of flying as of giving me a farthing."

"I wonder how it is I am so infatuated with you, when you have never attempted before me the least disguise of your cold and calculating disposition?" he exclaimed involuntarily.

"I am not calculating," she contradicted. "I know the value of money, and my education has been such that I cannot do without the luxuries it brings; but that I am not mercenary I clearly prove by consenting to wait for you when I might marry an old man to-morrow who is ten times richer than you can ever expect to be. By-the-bye, how shall you set about making your fortune?"

"I don't know yet. I shall let circumstances guide me; but you may depend upon it I shall not permit one chance to slip through my fingers. Do you think I might venture back to the Limes with you?" he added wistfully.

"No, it will be better not. I shall say nothing of having seen you, and that will prevent inquiries from being made," she said, after a moment's thought. "You can write to me sometimes, under cover to my maid, and let me know how you are getting on. And now," she added, "good-bye. I have been here quite long enough, and if I stay longer, mamma will want to know what has kept me, and I shall have to find an excuse—which is no easy matter, for she is so very sharp."

As she would not permit the wisdom of her words to be refuted, they said adieu, and then the lady drove off, leaving her lover standing in the middle of the road, and gazing miserably after her till a sudden curve hid her from sight. "Who would venture to deny the power of beauty?" he muttered, as he turned and began walking rapidly in the opposite direction. "I know she is not worth the love I give her, and yet there is nothing at which I would hesitate in order to make her mine!"

Then his thoughts travelled back to the beginning of his intimacy with her—an intimacy which commenced accidentally two months before at a certain midland town where she and her parents were visiting, and whither he had gone for the purpose of attending some races in which he took a special interest. Georgina had been crossing the road, when a pair of horses in a carriage just behind her had become startled, and dashed forward so suddenly and swiftly that she, looking up and observing them so near, had become paralysed with terror, and quite

incapable of moving either to right or left.

Edward Neilson, who, to do him justice, was brave enough for anything, happened to be on the pavement, and rushed forward just in time to catch her in his arms, and save her from the death that must otherwise have been her fate. This rescue led to an acquaintance which speedily ripened into love; but Mr. and Mrs. Dundas, directly they observed the turn affairs were taking, lost no time in putting their veto against anything like an engagement between their beautiful daughter and a man of whom they knew hardly anything save that he was poor, and therefore to be shunned. They took Georgina away immediately, but not before Edward had let her know the nature of his feelings, and received an assurance that they were returned.

It happened that there had been some misapprehension with regard to his name, and the Dundases knew him as Edward Nelson. He did not attempt to rectify this error, having reasons of his own for desiring to keep them ignorant of certain matters in connection with himself that were better buried in oblivion; neither did he mention a word of his sister, who, he discovered, was living at the house of their nearest neighbour, for he was well aware that the fact of her occupying a subordinate position at Verschoyle Towers would be far from a passport to the favour of Georgina or her parents.

Although he had, of course, come from London for the sole purpose of seeing Miss Dundas, he decided, after his interview with her, to go on to the Towers and pay a visit to Maggie, whom he had not seen for three years. As he walked along his thoughts were busy with that problem that has occupied men's minds for so many hundreds of years—how best to woo good fortune; and whether he succeeded in winning her or not, one thing at least was positive, that he did not lack ability to take occasion by the hand, or strength of will to mould circumstances as much as possible to his purpose, even if, in so doing, he had to sacrifice the few scruples of honour remaining to him.

He approached the Towers through the avenue, at the end of which he turned to his right, intending to seek entrance through the great oaken door; but happening to look to the other end of the terrace, he observed the figure of a girl standing at the open French casement, and regarding him attentively. It was Maggie, who had taken advantage of Mr. Verschoyle's absence to set in order both his study and

the little room adjoining, of which he had given her the key. The recognition of brother and sister was simultaneous, and instead of going towards the door, Edward Neilson turned back and met Maggie on the terrace, just outside Mr. Verschoyle's study, into which, after greeting him, she drew him.

"Aren't you surprised to see me?" he asked, as he kissed the ripe bloom of her cheeks, and held her out at arms' length to look in surprise at the sister who had shot up from a gawky girl—as she was when he last saw her—into such a graceful woman.

"Very much, but none the less glad on that account," she rejoined, thinking in her turn what a handsome fellow he was, and wondering a little at the thick gold chain and brilliant diamond ring he wore, which certainly did not indicate the poverty of which he had complained.

Edward did not think fit to enlighten her as to the primary object of his visiting the neighbourhood, but contented himself with telling Maggie how well she looked, and asking whether she liked the kind of life she was now leading, at which question a soft glow overspread the girl's face, and she answered truthfully that she had never before been equally happy. If Edward had been less occupied in his own concerns, the reply, and the manner in which it was uttered, might have aroused his suspicions, and provoked further inquiries, but as it was he passed it over, and began asking details of his father's death.

The brother and sister had not been in conversation very long when they were interrupted by a hurried knock at the door, and a domestic entered; saying that Mrs. Wakefield had fainted, upon which Maggie hastily left the room, telling Edward to remain there until her return. The young man, having nothing better to do, began to look round the apartment in which he found himself, and after glancing through the book-shelves, and at the pictures on the walls, carried his examination into the next room, the door of which had been left ajar. Although she had taken some of the dust from the furniture, and gathered up the useless bits of paper scattered about, Maggie had followed Mr. Verschoyle's instructions, and left untouched the plans and drawings, which, together with the engine, were lying on the table, and Edward Neilson's attention was at once directed to them. He glanced at them, at first cursorily, then his manner became more earnest as he studied them, and at length after looking round to assure

himself that he was alone, he not only examined the drawings, but the model itself with great minuteness.

"It is a splendid idea!" he exclaimed, aloud. "It has often been attempted, but never so cleverly. Why, this means a fortune to its inventor!"

Although the model itself was not finished, there was amongst the other papers one that gave it in all its completeness; and this happened to catch Neilson's eye. While he bent over it, eagerly studying its smallest details, a sudden thought seemed to strike him, for he gave a quick, nervous start, and became very pale, as he peered about him, with the shifting, apprehensive expression of one who fears another's presence. He did not look at the plan again, but remained for a few seconds in an attitude of meditation, his brows knit together, and his hand pulling at his moustache.

"It is a risk, but I could overcome all difficulties, I am sure," he muttered at length. "My knowledge of mechanics will serve me in good stead, and with this key in my hand, I *must* open the gate that leads to fortune. Still—"

Still—there were some scruples left—some last desperate clinging to the few straws of honour remaining—some remembrance of a time when the word "gentleman" had been more than a mere name, and a boy's fond ambition had been to deserve it. But that was ten or twelve years since—so long ago that only a vague memory of it still lived—a memory too weak to combat with the demon now tempting him.

"It means money—it means power—it means *Georgina*," he whispered to himself; and with this consideration the last remnants of conscience were swept away. He took up the two plans that lay side by side without further ado, folded them carefully into as small a compass as possible, and then placed them in an inner breast-pocket, after which he retreated to the study, and, leaving the door in exactly the same position as before, he sat down and awaited Maggie's return.

It was not long before she came in, looking rather worried and anxious; for, although Mrs. Wakefield had recovered from her swoon, she was still very weak, and most unwilling to be left alone. Edward Neilson had now no desire to prolong his visit, and, declining the offer of any refreshment, said he must make haste back to the station in order to catch the up train, and therefore rose to bid his sister good-bye.

"Oh, by-the-bye, Maggie!" he said, in a casual sort of manner, as he took her

hand, "you need not say anything about my having been here. You have not already done so, have you?"

"No, for Mrs. Wakefield was so irritable that I thought it best to defer communicating the fact of my having a visitor," returned Maggie, with a smile. "But why do you object to its being mentioned?"

"How silly you girls are—always wanting reasons for the most trifling things!" he exclaimed. "I simply want you to hold your tongue about having seen me. It is surely not a great favour to ask."

"Very well, I will not speak of it, then," returned Maggie, gently, and thinking to herself that she ought to tell Edward of the position in which she stood towards Mr. Verschoyle; but, loth to part with her cherished secret, more especially as he seemed to be in a mood far from sympathetic, she finally compromised the matter, and satisfied her conscience by resolving to write to him later on; and so Edward left, without for a moment guessing that the man he had so shamefully robbed was in reality the betrothed of his sister.

As it was growing dusk the same evening, Maggie stole quietly out of the house and down the avenue to meet Eugene on his way home from the county town, her heart beating with a tumult of happiness at the prospect of seeing him, although they had parted so recently. She had in her hand a telegram that had arrived during the day; and by-and-by, when he came, and dismounting, led his horse up the avenue while he walked by her side, she gave it to him—not without a certain vague apprehension which proved to be but too well founded.

He uttered an exclamation of surprise as he read the contents, and then proceeded to communicate them to Maggie. The message was from an aunt of his—his mother's only surviving sister—who resided in the South of France, and with whom, through some family quarrel that had taken place years ago, he himself had had little or no communication. One of her servants now telegraphed that her mistress was dangerously ill, and, having no friends about her, she was most anxious to see her nephew, whom she entreated to come over without delay.

"And shall you go?" questioned Maggie, with a tremor in her voice.

"I must, my dearest, I have no alternative," he answered, bending down his head to kiss her. "I cannot allow the nearest relative I have in the world to die without seeing me, after she has expressed a wish to do so. No, I must start first thing to-

morrow morning, and while I am away I shall expect nice long letters from you very often, telling me all you do, and say, and think."

Maggie tried to look upon this as a consolation, but it was a very poor one compared with the pain his absence would give her. Nevertheless she said little about it, and they continued walking together up and down the avenue, in the starlit quiet of the summer night, looking forward to the life that was to be made so sweet by their love, and building in the air stately fabrics which were to take shape in that magic future stretching out in dim loveliness before them.

"Do you know," said Maggie, just before they went indoors, "I am so happy that I cannot realise my joy—I have the feeling that something will come to mar it—that I shall lose you!"

"No fear of that, darling," he answered. "We shall certainly be separated for a little time, but after that we will always be together, for, as Longfellow says—'The threads of our two lives are woven in one!'"

## CHAPTER V.

HE first two days that followed Mr. Verschoyle's departure for the Continent dragged themselves very wearily along so far as Maggie was concerned, but the third was brightened by a letter from him, in which he wrote word that, on arriving at Nice, he found his aunt so ill her life was despaired of, but since then she had rallied wonderfully, and although still in a condition which rendered the least excitement injurious to her, hopes of ultimate recovery were entertained. She had, however, earnestly entreated him to stay with her for another week or two, and, indeed, made such a point of urging his presence that her physician was fearful of the effect a refusal would probably have. Under these circumstances, but much against his will, Eugene was prevailed upon to prolong his visit, although, as he told her, he was longing to get home to Maggie, and also regretting that his projected patent should thus be brought to a standstill.

Meanwhile, Maggie, as in sisterly duty bound, had lost no time in writing to acquaint Edward with the fact of her engagement, also mentioning that Mr. Verschoyle was abroad, but that she hoped to introduce her brother to him on his return. He received her letter as he was sitting at breakfast, two mornings after his visit to Verschoyle Towers, and its contents

had, as may readily be surmised, a most startling effect. Indeed, he was almost overwhelmed by the news, and the suggestion of the consequences which would follow a marriage between his sister and Eugene Verschoyle.

"But it must not take place—it *shall not!*" he exclaimed energetically, starting up in his excitement, and beginning to pace the room. "Heaven and earth must be moved to prevent such a consummation! Why, it would be like putting a lighted match to the mine over which I stand, if I were to permit it, for Verschoyle would inevitably discover my appropriation of his idea, and then Fate only knows what would be the consequence!"

For one moment the suggestion was entertained of throwing up the desperate game he was playing and letting events take their chance; but this weakness was of short duration—it was not in his bold nature to draw back when once he had put his hand to the plough, especially in a case like this, where the stake was so high, and success seemed to him almost certain. In any case, he reasoned, Mr. Verschoyle must sooner or later discover he had been forestalled in the patent he intended taking out; and if he became aware of Neilson's identity, and also of his visit to Verschoyle Towers, he would doubtless connect the two facts, and thus arrive at the truth. At present he, of course, knew nothing of Edward's having been at his house, and would not do so until he saw Maggie again, and this Neilson determined to prevent. Yes, they must be separated at all hazards—he had sinned already; and if, in order to derive benefit from his crime, it impelled him to the commission of another one equally base, he must be prepared to go through with it to the bitter end.

For about an hour he stayed there pondering, and then, having arranged in his own mind a plan of action, he determined to lose no time in carrying it into effect, and thereupon went straight to Paddington and took a ticket for the station nearest to Verschoyle Towers. A few hours later he knocked at the door of the Towers, and requested to see Maggie, upon which the housemaid who answered his summons ushered him in, and asked him what name she should carry to Miss Neilson.

"You need not mention my name—say a gentleman is waiting to see her," he rejoined shortly, and the girl, somewhat surprised at this answer, went in search of Maggie, who presently came in, rather curious to know who her visitor could be. Her astonishment when she saw Edward

was unbounded, and was pretty accurately expressed by her face.

"I see my presence amazes you," he said gravely, after greeting her, "but I received your letter this morning, and the news it contained made it a matter of necessity that I should see you without delay."

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed, with quick apprehension. "What could there possibly have been in my letter to cause a hasty journey?"

Before answering, he drew her to a couch and seated himself beside her, while he clasped both her hands in his. "Maggie," he said, his tone low and earnest, "you are a brave girl, I know, but I am going to tell you something which will put your courage to its most supreme test. However, I have no fear of the result, for I know that with you duty is a religion. When I read this morning the intelligence that you were engaged to Eugene Verschoyle I was overwhelmed with dismay, for there is a reason why you can never wed him—or any other man, for the matter of that."

"Edward!" she exclaimed, with a sharp gasp, while her face became pale under the influence of his manner, and she tried to draw herself away from him. "Your words are an enigma to me."

"Would to Heaven they might remain so!" he said, groaning; then with sudden earnestness: "Remember, Maggie, in the future that the force of circumstances and not my own will has compelled me to act as I am about to do—that nothing short of absolute necessity would have driven me to do it, but that it is justice towards you and Verschoyle himself which impels me to the disclosure which I have travelled from London to make." She shook her head with a gesture of impatience as he momentarily paused, and then he said suddenly, "Have you ever heard where and under what circumstances your mother died?"

"I know she died soon after I was born, and I always fancied there was a sort of mystery about her death, for papa could never be got to speak of it—the subject brought up too many painful reminiscences, he said."

"That is indeed true; nevertheless it is time your ignorance should be enlightened. Maggie, your mother died *hopelessly insane!*"

"Insane!" repeated the girl, in a low voice of horror, and starting back. "Oh, no, Edward! it cannot be—you must be mistaken! If such had been the case I should surely have heard of it before!"

"How could you do so, when every precaution was taken against letting it reach you? It was decided—and wisely—that this terrible knowledge should not be permitted to cast a shadow on the brightness of your youth: but now the time has come when to preserve that silence would be both cruel and unjust."

Maggie buried her face in the cushions, and remained for some time silent, endeavouring to fully realise the intelligence thus broken to her. At last she raised her head. "But, Edward, terrible as this undoubtedly is, I do not see what influence it can have on my engagement."

"Do you mean to say, then, that with the seeds of this awful malady in your blood you would think yourself justified in marrying?" he asked sternly.

This was a view of the question which had not presented itself to her, and a cry of intense bitterness rose to her lips, as she recognised the justice of Edward's words. "Would you have me believe that my inheritance is *insanity*?" she exclaimed, again covering her eyes as if to shut out the terror of her position. "Oh, Edward! don't let me think anything so hideous—so hopeless!"

He got up hastily and walked to the window, through which he gazed in a moody sort of abstraction, Maggie meanwhile remaining in bewilderment from which she strove in vain to extricate herself. One fact only presented itself with clearness before her mental vision—that it was, as Edward said, utterly impossible for her to think of marrying with this impending shadow, that might, at any moment, overwhelm her.

"Is there no cure for it—no help?" she cried aloud, in a perfect agony of despair.

He shook his head despondingly. "The taint is ineradicable. Mind, I do not say you will go mad—indeed, such an hypothesis is most unlikely, as your brain appears to be perfectly well balanced. Nevertheless, it is certain you inherit your mother's tendencies, and under such conditions it would be very wrong to keep Mr. Verschoyle to his promise."

Yes, she saw this, and the knowledge brought with it a sense of the bitterest desolation. Just as the cup of happiness was raised to her lips, and she had taken her first deep draught of delight, it was rudely dashed away, and broken into a thousand fragments by an inexorable Fate, whose decree there was no resisting!

"Come," said Edward, briskly, "crying won't do you any good—the thing first to be considered is how you are to get away from

here, as of course it will be impossible for you to remain now. What do you say to returning with me to London at once?"

With an effort Maggie calmed herself sufficiently to look her situation determinedly in the face, and she came to the conclusion that Edward's suggestion had better be adopted. It would, she was well aware, never do for her to stay at the Towers, where the influence of Eugene's presence would at the same time make her task of renunciation all the harder, and sharpen the keen edge of regret.

"Luckily, I happen to have some money just now," went on her brother, watching her keenly, "so you may make your mind easy on the score of expense. If you'll take my advice, you will go and pack up your things immediately, and come back with me to-night; and you can leave a note for Mr. Verschoyle breaking off your engagement."

So overcome was Maggie by the misery she suffered, that she was well-nigh incapable of thinking for herself, and therefore was the more inclined to be passively acquiescent, and let her brother act for her in this crisis of her fate.

Edward brought forward a writing-case and put it before her. "Scribble a few words of farewell, but don't say where you are going, or what reason induces you to leave," he told her. "Only make it clear that all is now over between you and Verschoyle." And, while her eyes were almost blinded by unshed tears, she managed to trace the lines that turned the page on her brief, sweet love-dream; they ran thus:—

"Circumstances which it is impossible for me to resist force me to leave you for ever. Do not seek to find me, for in the future our lives must lie apart, and I release you from every promise you have made, while claiming for myself an equal freedom. God grant you may be happy!"

Edward, looking over her shoulder, saw what she had written, and bent down to press his lips on her forehead. "It is better so, Maggie," he whispered. "You are a brave girl, and the future shall requite you for the pain of the past. Now go, and get your things together."

But before doing so, Maggie again took the pen, and wrote a few lines to Mrs. Wakefield, who was spending the day with some friends at the county town—thanking her for all her kindness, and begging her not to deem her ungrateful for leaving thus hurriedly. Naturally she could not explain her reason for going, as the housekeeper was not even aware of the relations existing between herself and Eugene, so her note simply consisted of regrets at the

circumstances that necessitated this hasty departure. Then, still acting in accordance with her brother's directions, she went upstairs, packed her portmanteaux, and two hours later was whirling away in the train, from what had been to her the scene of so much happiness, but which she now looked on with eyes of despairing misery.

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When, a week later, Eugene Verschoyle returned home, his eyes bright with the hope of resting on the girl he loved, he was, as may be guessed, bitterly disappointed at finding her gone. On reading the few hasty lines she had scribbled, a keen sense of injury took possession of him, as he asked himself what motive there could possibly be strong enough to induce Maggie to act as she had done—to leave, without a word of explanation, just as their troth vows had been exchanged!

Before he had been in the house very long he was joined by Mrs. Wakefield, who, ever since Maggie's departure, had been vainly trying to elucidate the mystery surrounding it, and was hoping Mr. Verschoyle might help her. On this point, however, she was mistaken, for she soon found his knowledge to be even less than her own.

"There is only one explanation that suggests itself for Margaret Neilson's strange conduct," she said, after some conversation on the subject, "and that I am very loth to accept, although I think it may be well to mention it to you. The housemaid tells me that on the day Margaret left, she had an interview with some strange gentleman, who refused to give his name, and with whom she went away." The housekeeper glanced across to see how Mr. Verschoyle received this intelligence, but beyond a slight pallor, he allowed no symptom of vexation to escape him. "Mary also says that the same gentleman came here the very day before you left for Nice, but Margaret never said a word to me about it," she added aggrievedly.

Mr. Verschoyle did not answer at once; when he did he had schooled his voice to calmness. "I have no doubt that Miss Neilson had some perfectly satisfactory motive for leaving, which she will communicate to us when she thinks fit. In the meantime, we must accept the matter as it stands—it is useless to busy ourselves with idle speculations."

"It is impossible," he said to himself, when he was alone, "I will not believe that my little girl is aught but pure and good—she will never be untrue to me!"

he muttered, half aloud; and then let his thoughts drift backward and rest on the memories of the past few months.

After awhile, he tried to comfort himself with the conclusion that Maggie would soon return, and that in the meantime he must let no doubt disturb the faith he had reposed in her. With this resolution came the one of occupying himself in perfecting his machine, and he therefore went to his little work-room, which he had not entered since the day when he had given Maggie the key. She had returned it in the evening, and he had carelessly put it in his pocket, and unwittingly taken it to Nice with him, so that the door had remained unopened ever since. Upon entering he went straight to the table on which his plans lay, and turning over several stray sheets of paper, began to look for the one which gave the details of the engine in all their completeness; but it was nowhere visible. He turned over every document that the room contained, searched diligently in every drawer, looked behind every article of furniture—all in vain; the most important plan, and a drawing containing diagrams of the machine, had both vanished as completely as if they had never been.

His first action after this discovery was to examine the fastenings of door and window—both were secure, and had evidently not been tampered with; then he sat down and proceeded to think out the position. It could hardly be by accident that these two particular plans had disappeared; and yet no one had been in the room save Maggie and himself, no one even knew of their existence save Maggie and himself. Could it be, after all, that he had been mistaken in her, and that she had simply been playing a part which she had dropped as soon as it suited her to do so? No, he would not believe it—he would trust her in spite of all; and yet—Eugene leaned his head on his hands, and groaned aloud in the agony of the great fear which had come upon him. All he had in the world he would have given at that moment to be able to look into her eyes, and find an assurance of her truth in their clear depths; but, alas! she was far away, and he had no clue by which he could trace her out.

## CHAPTER VI.

 EARLY two years had passed away, always a long time to look forward to, and, under certain circumstances, as long to look back upon. Many events had happened in the

interval, and great changes been wrought in the fortunes of at least one of the characters whose history we have been in part following. Fate had so far favoured Edward Neilson that the promise he had made Georgina Dundas of returning to claim her as a rich man had fulfilled itself. The stolen labour of another man's brain had succeeded, in America, beyond his fondest expectations ; and thus far there had been no voice save his own conscience to whisper his treachery to the world.

Sometimes he would wonder how it was that he never heard anything of Verschoyle, but for the most part he had too many things to think of for any doubts or misgivings to harbour in his mind. One of his great objects was to keep from Maggie any knowledge of the manner in which he was achieving wealth, and this he easily contrived to effect, for, in point of fact, the girl was too indifferent and miserable ever to take much interest in her brother's fortunes. That he was engaged in some kind of business she was aware, and also that it was of a very successful nature; but beyond this she knew really nothing, for she very seldom went out, and saw visitors even less frequently, her state of health providing a very good excuse for Edward to keep her seclusion almost unbroken.

As for him, all his energies were strained, all his aims directed to one issue; and when a man starts on a race, as he had started, and bends the whole of his endeavours to one point, it is probable that, given health and opportunity, he will effectually reach his goal. So it was with Edward Neilson ; and a little before the time he had specified, he announced to Maggie his intention of sailing for England, in order, so he said, to carry out certain business engagements requiring his presence, but in the meantime it would be better for her to remain where she was, rather than risk a voyage across the Atlantic. To this, however, Maggie strenuously objected. A home-sickness had seized on her, and such an opportunity of seeing her native land was not to be passed by ; so in spite of the persuasions of Edward, she insisted on having her own way, and accompanied him to London forthwith.

Arrived there, he lost no time in taking her to some out-of-the-way apartments in the north of the Metropolis, where he calculated there would be few chances of her meeting any one she knew; and after seeing her safely installed, he himself immediately started for Georgina's home, pleading to Maggie the excuse of "business" for his absence.

How changed were his circumstances since he last visited the place ! he thought as he was being whirled on in the train through the sunny cornfields, where waving shadows were chasing each other along, and the deep, rich glow of poppies shone out from among the ripening grain ; and a certain sense of surprise came over him as he alighted at the quiet little station, and saw that it was exactly the same as when he left it—the sort of surprise that seizes one who finds himself outstripping the common march of events.

Sentimental Edward Neilson certainly was not, but that he had permitted himself to be completely enslaved by the sensuous perfection of Georgina Dundas's beauty could not be doubted ; and as he approached the house where he knew she was, his heart—which had been callous to Maggie's sufferings, and impervious to every call of honour—beat with such suffocating rapidity that he had to stand for a few seconds in order to calm his agitation before seeking to gain admittance. At length he was ushered into the drawing-room, and after a few minutes had elapsed, the door was quietly opened, and Georgina entered—Georgina, as fair, stately, and unemotional as ever—perhaps more beautiful, indeed, than formerly : and as Edward caught her in his arms a wild thrill of exultation shot through him at the thought of calling such a peerless creature his own, and he felt that even the terrible risk he had run was more than compensated by the joy of this moment.

After the first surprise of meeting was over, Edward sat down by her side, and without giving any definite account of the nature of the transactions in which he had been engaged, told her of the wonderful successes he had attained, and asked if she were willing to ratify her part of the promise now that he had fulfilled his.

"I am ready to marry you whenever you wish," she said frankly. "Mamma and papa will both be dumb with astonishment when they hear of your good fortune," she added, rather triumphing in the idea of proving to her parents that her faith in her lover's abilities had not been misplaced. "You are sure, Edward, *quite* sure, you are as well off as you say?"

"I am as rich as your father, and have every prospect of trebling my income," he declared boldly ; "and I am quite prepared to verify this statement by showing Mr. Dundas my bank-book, and otherwise proving its truth."

"Then he will no longer raise any objection to my marriage," said the girl, with a deep sigh of satisfaction. "Come,"

rising and taking his arm, "let us go at once to him—he is in the garden with my mother."

Edward made no objection, and together they passed out of the house and went to the lawn, where Mr. and Mrs. Dundas, and a gentleman whose head was turned away from Neilson, were sitting under the shadow of a walnut-tree. Neither appeared very much delighted at the meeting, although both did their best to veil their dissatisfaction; and after the greetings were over, Mrs. Dundas proceeded to fulfil her duties as hostess, and introduced Mr. Nelson—as she called him—to the other visitor, who was none other than Eugene Verschoyle.

Callous as he was, Edward Neilson could not look completely unmoved on the man whose career he had done his best to blast; and in spite of his endeavours, his face became actually pallid as he acknowledged the presentation, making at the same time an instinctive backward movement, which was not lost on Verschoyle, who, unable to account for it, set himself to study this guest of the Dundases more closely than he might otherwise have thought it worth while to do.

As he looked, a certain sort of familiarity appeared in the features—not a resemblance to Maggie, for brother and sister were utterly unlike—but something which convinced Eugene that this was not the first time they had met; and presently he recalled to his memory a perfect recollection of having seen him on the high-road some two years before, talking to Miss Dundas.

Naturally enough, he said nothing of this discovery, nor would it have had any effect on him had it not been for the curious sort of restraint which made itself so apparent in Neilson's manner as to challenge observation.

By-and-by Edward contrived to lead Mr. Dundas away from the others, and lost no time in explaining to him how matters stood with regard to himself and Georgina, stating at the same time his own prospects of wealth, the rest being, as he anticipated, a free consent on the part of Mr. Dundas to his daughter's marriage, provided her suitor could verify his assertions of the financial position he said he occupied.

Perfectly content with this, Edward left his prospective father-in-law, and rejoined Georgina, who was talking to her mother and Mr. Verschoyle; but the former, being naturally curious to know with what object Neilson had taken up her husband's time for the last half-hour, speedily left the

group in order to gratify her inquisitiveness, and returned greatly elated at the answer her inquiry elicited.

"We had arranged to drive back with Mr. Verschoyle and have dinner at the Towers; he has extended his invitation to you, so you must come too," said Georgina in an aside to her lover. Much to her astonishment Edward manifested the greatest disinclination to accompany them, and it was only after a great deal of persuasion that he at last yielded a reluctant consent, and allowed her the triumph of obtaining her own way, even when prudence opposed it. So, a little while later, they were all driven to the Towers in Mr. Verschoyle's waggonette, and after dinner were taken by their host into the grounds—neater and better kept now than they used to be, even in poor Maggie's time, for wealth had come to Verschoyle as well as to Neilson in these two years; the aunt to whom he had gone at Nice had died, bequeathing him the whole of her large fortune, and thus enabling him to pay off the mortgages on his estates, and to feel himself at least free from debt.

Try as he would to reason against the absurdity of fancying there could be any danger of his being recognised as the author of the crime this scene had witnessed two years before, Edward found it utterly impossible to feel perfectly at ease. His sensations during the whole of the evening were those of a man treading on a volcano, which might at any moment explode beneath his feet; and as, at last, the time for departure came, he breathed a deep sigh of intense relief, and astonished Georgina by his recovered cheerfulness on their way home.

Left once more alone, Mr. Verschoyle began to muse over the events of the day, his mind dwelling more particularly on the strange demeanour exhibited by his new acquaintance, which had puzzled him not a little, although he was a close student of human nature in all its varied phases, and had, as a rule, little difficulty in tracing cause and effect. As he leaned back in his chair, his brows knit together in the sternness which had now become almost habitual to him, there came a knock at the door, and the parlour-maid entered for the purpose of closing the shutters. Having completed her task, she seemed to linger on in the room, and Mr. Verschoyle looked up in some slight surprise.

"Do you wish to speak to me, Mary?" he asked.

"If you will excuse the liberty, sir," she replied. "Perhaps, sir, you remember asking me some time ago—when

Miss Neilson left, in fact—to describe the gentleman who took her away. Well, sir, the same gentleman was here this evening—I recognised him directly I saw him in the garden."

"What!" cried Eugene, excitedly, starting up and facing her. "Is this true—are you sure?"

"Quite sure," very decidedly. "I could not be mistaken, for I had a good look at him." Saying which she left the room, and Eugene, according to his usual custom when agitated, began pacing restlessly backward and forward, the old sick pain at his heart which had been there ever since the day the cruel note in which Maggie bade him farewell had been put into his hands. Ah, the misery and desolation of the time that followed her departure! Even now he could not think of it without groaning aloud in very bitterness of spirit. He had kept his faith in her as long as he could—had put advertisements in the papers, made every inquiry possible, and done his utmost to trace her out—but all in vain; and at last a perfect apathy of despair had seized him, an utter distaste and weariness of life which made existence itself a burden almost too heavy to be borne. Then had come his aunt's munificent bequest; and as this did away with the primary object for which he had worked at his engine, all his former interest in it departed, and he had made no further efforts to perfect it.

"Was it possible," he said to himself, his eyes brightening with some of their old spirit and fire, "was it possible that this man who had been at the Towers was the same who had lured poor Maggie away two years ago? Was it possible that at last the mystery would be solved, and all the old doubts set at rest, at once and for ever?"

At any rate, Eugene determined to follow up the clue thus put in his hands, and to leave no stone unturned in his effort to fathom the mystery which had so long perplexed him.

\* \* \* \*

Two days afterwards, Edward Neilson, having come to a perfect understanding with his fiancée and her family, left for town by the afternoon express, in order to make the necessary arrangements for his marriage, which he had begged should take place without delay. So elated was he by the success of his plans, and so engrossed with his own thoughts, that he did not observe a man, wrapped in a large ulster, standing in the shadow of some trees at the extreme end of the station,

and who, just as the train was starting, jumped into an empty carriage. This person was Eugene Verschoyle, who having ascertained Neilson's intention of leaving for London, had resolved to follow him thither, and keep a watch on his movements.

It was dusk when they reached the terminus, and Edward having secured a hansom, jumped into it and told the man to drive to "21, Myrtle Square, Camden Road," which order Verschoyle fortunately overheard, and repeated quietly to the driver as he, too, took his place inside another cab.

Half an hour later the first hansom drew up in front of a small but pretty house situated in a square leading from the main thoroughfare, and then Eugene hastily sprang out and dismissed his Jehu, while he crossed to the opposite side of the road, keeping his eyes fixed on the door at which Neilson had knocked, and through which he presently entered.

A few seconds afterwards the gas was lighted in a room on the right that had previously been in darkness, and the watcher witnessed a sight which, for a moment, made his heart stand still, and then begin to pulsate madly against his side, for there, in the glow of the gaslight, stood a slender girl, with a sweet, pale face that, in spite of its languid expression, seemed to Eugene the fairest his eyes had ever rested on. She went forward and lifted her face, on which Neilson impressed a careless kiss, and after a little conversation he left the room, and came out into the road again, where the hansom was still waiting. Giving some rapid directions to the driver, Edward re-entered the cab and was driven away towards the West End.

Eugene hesitated a moment as to what course he should pursue; then the desire to see Maggie—to hear from her own lips an explanation of her conduct, even though it should prove her own condemnation—was too strong to be resisted; and, obeying an uncontrollable impulse, he went forward and rang the bell. It was answered by a servant, but Eugene did not give her a chance of refusing him admittance, for oblivious to every consideration of etiquette, and determinin'g that nothing should prevent him seeing Maggie, he pushed past the girl, and tapped against the door of the room where he knew she was. A listless voice from within bade him enter, and he obeyed, carefully closing the door behind him, and standing with his back against it as he faced her.

No cry escaped Maggie as she recognised

him, but every drop of blood receded from her face, and her hands were pressed convulsively across her bosom, while her lips trembled as if they would fain form words, but were rendered powerless by excess of emotion. Then, seeing the deep, undying love of his gaze, every consideration was forgotten except that she stood in the presence of the man who was more to her than all the world besides, and a moment afterwards she had thrown herself on his breast, and was clasped to him in an embrace whose tenderness no words can describe—for one glance into her sweet eyes had set Eugene's doubts at rest, and he felt that whatever mystery there might be, she at least was innocent of all wrong.

"Maggie, Maggie, why have you kept yourself away from me?" he exclaimed reproachfully, and holding her tight in spite of her efforts to withdraw herself. "Do you guess how much anguish you have made me suffer through your absence?"

"I could not help it—I only did what was right!" she said pitifully, all the light fading from her eyes, as she remembered the terrible chasm that lay between them. "Oh, Eugene! loose me—let me go! We can never be aught to each other save friends—never!"

"I will let you go when you have told me what divides us—not before." His voice was one of quiet resolution, and she knew that a further attempt at concealment would now be useless. Besides, would it not be really better to acquaint him with the facts of the case, and let him see that it was no girlish caprice which had prompted her strange conduct?

So, her eyes downcast, and the feverish colour coming and going in her cheeks, she told him in a low, shamed voice how her brother had made the disclosures to her which had parted them; and although she said nothing of the weary pain of the days which had followed their separation, he had no difficulty in guessing how much she must have suffered.

"So it was your brother who took you away?" said Eugene, as she concluded, "And I suppose it was your brother who came in here, and went ~~out~~ again a little while ago?"

"Yes, he had just returned from transacting some business in Manchester," replied Maggie, to whom Edward had prudently refrained from mentioning his matrimonial intentions.

"Then he is in business?" inquired Eugene, somewhat surprised at her answer.

"He went in partnership with an American firm of engineers directly we got out there, two years ago, and has suc-

ceeded wonderfully well—indeed, he is now a wealthy man."

By what subtle process of reasoning it came can never be actually explained, but certain it is that as he heard Maggie's statement, an inkling of the true state of affairs burst upon Eugene. "Maggie," he said, with seeming irrelevance, and looking at her very keenly, "do you remember my giving you the key of my little study, the morning before I was summoned to my aunt's bedside?"

"I remember it perfectly well," returning his gaze with an utter freedom from embarrassment.

"Then perhaps you can tell me if any one save yourself entered the room during the day. I ask because the plan that gave my engine in all its completeness, as well as another important drawing, were missing when I next went in."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the girl in the utmost astonishment. "I recollect the drawing you speak of, and I also remember putting it in the place it always occupied on your writing-table, after I had finished dusting the room. No one could have taken it!"

"Nevertheless, such is the case, and it is certain that it was stolen during the day on which the key was in your possession. Can you call to mind if any one entered the study save yourself?"

Maggie considered a moment. "I am quite sure I was the only person who went in, for when I was not in the room myself I locked the door and put the key in my pocket. The only time it remained in the lock was while I went to attend to Mrs. Wakefield, who was taken ill that day, and then my brother was waiting in the adjoining apartment."

"Then, on my soul, Maggie, I believe your brother it was who took the papers!" exclaimed Eugene, in violent excitement, as he recalled Neilson's strange behaviour and the various circumstances tending to criminate him. Maggie started back, and looked at him in absolute bewilderment, striving to understand the charge thus brought against Edward. "If such be really the case, may he not have invented the story of your mother's madness, as it would be to his interest to keep us apart?" he went on eagerly.

Before she could reply there came the sound of many footsteps outside, and immediately afterwards the front-door was opened and several people seemed to enter the passage, then there was a buzz of voices and a pause—apparently of indecision.

"What is it, I wonder?" said Maggie, in an alarmed voice, and even as she

spoke the door was thrown open to admit the passage of two men who bore a kind of stretcher, on which was laid an inanimate form.

"Good heavens!—it is Edward—it is my brother!" shrieked Maggie, running forward and throwing herself on her knees beside the figure that was now lying on the couch, perfectly motionless. "What has befallen him?"

At the sound of her voice Edward slowly raised his lids, and looked vacantly around; then, as his eyes rested on Maggie, a sudden intelligence dawned in them, and his lips moved, but he did not speak.

"There has been an accident," said a gentleman, stepping forward. "The horse of your brother's cab became frightened and ran away, and overturned the vehicle. I am a surgeon, and was called to the spot," he added, in explanation of his presence.

"But is he hurt very much—cannot something be done for him?" cried the girl, in an agony which was the more insupportable by reason of its helplessness. The surgeon turned away to avoid replying, and Verschoyle observed the gesture, and knew too well its significance—it told him, and truly, that Edward was past all human aid.

Nevertheless, his mind was perfectly clear, and there seemed to be something he wished to say, for there was a mute appeal in his eyes as he turned them on the doctor. Eugene had placed himself at the back of the couch, and was, therefore, beyond his range of vision. Some brandy was brought, and his sister held it to his lips, and tenderly raised his head as he drank it. "Send these people away—I have something to say to you," he gasped almost inarticulately, although the spirit had lent him a fictitious strength, and Maggie made a gesture of dismissal, which was obeyed by all save Eugene.

"Maggie, I know I can't live long, but before I go I want to make things straight for you," he murmured, speaking in gasping efforts, as his fingers closed convulsively over hers. "I have sinned—deeply, but retribution has overtaken me in the very moment of success—just as I thought I had secured it. Bend your head down, and listen while I tell you of my crime—they can't punish me for it now." His voice sank into a still lower key. "The business I was engaged on in America was the launching of a patent engine which Mr. Verschoyle had invented, and the

plan of which I took the day I came to see you at the Towers. Don't think too hardly of me—it was the hope of winning the woman I loved that urged me on; and then, when I heard of your engagement to Verschoyle, I felt that if I would succeed in my scheme you must be separated at all costs, so I told you the taint of madness was upon you, and thus effected my purpose. This idea was suggested to me by the fact that your mother really was mad when she died; but it was from the result of an accident which injured her brain, and not hereditary insanity, as I made you believe. Still, I knew if you had made inquiries you would not have been able to give me the lie, for it was an undisputed fact that she was not in her right mind at the time of her death, and her attendants knew nothing of how the case really stood. I was sorry when I saw you unhappy, but . . ."—he paused, exhausted, and signed to her to give him some brandy—"I always intended telling you the truth after I was married," he continued painfully. "You must go to Mr. Verschoyle, and give him my papers, they will explain everything." He stopped again, and a convulsive shudder stirred his limbs. "Maggie!" he cried, quickly and sharply, and throwing out his hands, "it is growing dark—I can't see—is this—death?" his voice falling to an awed whisper.

He was silent for a few minutes, then his lips formed the word "Georgina," but did not utter it, and a little while afterwards his eyes closed wearily, and his spirit took flight to that high tribunal where—let us hope—Mercy pleaded when Justice meted out its stern sentence on his erring soul.

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Some months afterwards there was a very quiet wedding in a certain quiet church in London; and a few weeks later on Eugene Verschoyle took his young wife home, when good Mrs. Wakefield came forward with genuine delight to welcome the new mistress of the Towers. She had already learned that her former assistant was now a wealthy heiress—for Eugene had positively refused to accept the money Neilson had accumulated in any other way than as his wife's dowry, and Maggie had submissively yielded to his wishes, thinking to herself that it little mattered to which it really belonged, seeing that—

"The threads of their two lives were woven in one!"

MARION SEVERN.

# TEA-TABLE TALK.—BY AMY KEN.

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A Wet Day.

Various Special Wedding Days.

“The Diamond Wedding.”

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MISS KEN’S party are still at Southampton, and, as Helena observed in a letter to her husband : Every day is now an assembly one, and Aunt Ken “makes sunshine where darkness else would be,” for you know we cannot always expect Queen’s weather, and to-day, as it is raining in torrents, I take the opportunity of recording events which you must make public. I do not quite wish to be a biographer, like Boswell was to Johnson, and record every little event that occurs wherein Aunt Ken has increased our store of knowledge ; but those I recount I want you to keep safely, that I may hereafter make a book of them. We saw a band passing this morning, and they tried to play a merry tune—“Haste to the wedding”—but somehow the elements seemed to mock them, and it created anything but a jubilant feeling—with us, at any rate. We asked what event they intended to celebrate, and we were told it was the “Golden Wedding Day” of some Southampton magnate, who had given his *employés* a holiday and a good dinner. Annie asked the meaning of this, and Aunt replied, as most of us already knew, when a couple have been married fifty years it is called the “Golden Wedding,” “but,” she added, with curious archness, “some of you may be anxious to know how many weddings a married couple are supposed, or, rather, were formerly supposed, to specially celebrate. First, there is the ‘Paper Wedding,’ one year after marriage, and it is said, in olden times, that after twelve months’ trial the fond father would say to his firstborn who had married, ‘Now, dost thou like the lass ? Will she make thee a good and prudent partner ?’ If he replied, ‘Yes, father,’ the paterfamilias would say, ‘Then we’ll change the paper into parchment, for as life is uncertain thee knowest she must have means provided for bringing up my grandchildren, if thou wert taken away from her.’ Five years after marriage was formerly called the ‘Wooden Wedding.’ Old pictures represent at this period a young married couple with two little ones playing with wooden horses, and father and mother looking lovingly upon their offspring ; and patting the little boy on the head, the father is presumed to say, ‘Wait a little longer, and thou shalt have a real horse.’ Ten years after marriage is called

the ‘Tin Wedding,’ and I really do not know the definition of this, except, perhaps, that the children, despising wood, look for metal of some kind, if it is only tin. Then we come to a marriage of twenty-five years, which is called the ‘Silver Wedding,’ and, oh ! what pretty pictures we have of this. The couple who have passed this period happily together, their hair now streaked with grey, a grown-up family around them, giving presents to their parents, and looking joyously in their countenances, as if they loved them still, though they in their turn had taken positions in the world, yet feeling that they owed everything to good and kind parents. Now we come to fifty years of married life, the ‘Golden Wedding.’ There are grandchildren now ; and the proud heads of a distinguished paternity exult that they have not lived in vain. There is yet another period which is given as seventy-five years of married life, and this is called the ‘Diamond Wedding ;’ few, if any, reach this period in our time.”

“But,” suggested Judith, “some people must have reached this, or it would not have a period affixed to it ?”

“Yes,” replied Aunt Ken, “a century ago, in the North of Germany a diamond wedding is recorded; the ages of the couple were given, the woman 90 and the man 95. The latter was blind, but the wife, though very parchment-like, appeared to have her faculties, and they are said to have lived two years after this. But we have a very extraordinary man living amongst us now, Sir Moses Montefiore, who something like fifty years ago was Lord Mayor of London. He was married in the year 1815, but I fear his wife is dead, though the dear old man lives on in health, though verging on 98 years. He is of Hebrew origin, and devotedly attached to his race, but liberal in his views.”

“I have often thought of asking you, since we visited the New Forest,” said Judith, “whether all the records concerning Sir Walter Tyrrel may be accounted correct ?—some of them appear very queer.”

“I should be sorry,” replied Miss Ken, “to believe implicitly all that has been recorded concerning him ; but we before referred to a dream and its fulfilment, and now I bring before your notice another ancient story, and also produce documentary evidence that I have

sought for your especial benefit. Whether William Rufus's death was really accidental, whether Sir Walter Tyrrel, either by chance, or bribed by Henry I., shot the fatal arrow, whether it was sped by the hand of some Saxon whom the fierce King had wronged, must ever remain one of the mysteries of English history. But a great many years ago a Matthew Paris wrote a history of the affair, which he is said to have obtained from creditable sources, and it is so very singular that I will read it to you : 'King William II. on the day preceding his death had a terrible dream ; he felt as if smitten with a javelin, and that forthwith there issued from the wound a stream of blood, which sprang up even to the sky, beclouding the sun and extinguishing the daylight. Starting from his slumbers, as a good Catholic, he invoked the Blessed Virgin ; and calling for a lamp, he ordered his chamberlains to sit beside him, through the whole night, during which the King could not sleep. When the morning dawned a monk of Italian origin asked to see the monarch, and said that he had crossed the seas for the special object of having an audience. The monarch ordered the monk into his presence, and after the latter had gone over various affairs of the Church, he desired to tell the King his dream ; but as divers affairs of State prevented a longer interview, one Robert FitzHamon, who was the best acknowledged friend at Court, was ordered by the King to entertain the monk, and tell him at a future time what he might be specially instructed to convey. At supper time, over a good stoup of wine, Robert FitzHamon related the monk's dream, which the latter thought was given as a warning. "Me thought," said the monk, "I saw the King enter a church with proud step, and more haughty than monarchs are wont to be, and he gazed contemptuously on all around him ; then seizing the crucifix with his teeth, he gnawed off its arms, and left it scarce a single limb. For some time the crucifix endured this, then the right foot then rose and felled the King on the pavement, and there he lay prostrate, and from his mouth leapt forth a flame, and it spread around and a cloudy smoke like chaos went up towards the clouds." The King laughed aloud when he heard this dream, forgetful that he himself had been alarmed the night previous ; but he exclaimed, "Here is a monk who hath dreamed monk-wise for his own profit. Give him a hundred shillings to see that he hath not dreamed in vain !" But the next night, the night before his death, the King had another horrible dream. He was in church, and he saw before him on the

altar an infant of exceeding beauty ; and feeling a sense of hunger, and a ravenous desire, he went and took a mouthful of the child's flesh, and as he ate it he thought the taste delicious. But when he sought to satisfy himself again, the child with stern aspect and threatening voice shouted, "Forbear ! Thou hast already taken too much !" The King awoke, and sent for a bishop who acted as his chaplain, and asked the interpretation of this dream. The bishop told the King that he must cease persecuting the Church, for this was sent as a warning to him from on High, concluding by saying, "Go not forth to the chase this day, lest evil fall upon thee." The King laughed at the bishop as he had done at the monk, and went forth into the woods to hunt. And lo ! it happened that an immense stag passed, and he said to Sir Walter Tyrrel, with whom he had previously had a few words, "Draw, demon ! draw !" at the same time shading his eyes from the sun with his hand. Then the swift arrow fled from the bow, even as the poet has expressed it—

"And once outsped, it flies beyond recall," and glancing against a neighbouring tree, turned aside and pierced the heart of the King, who fell down dead. His attendants, as well as the knight, were alarmed, and fled. But some of them afterwards returned, and took up the body, all cold and wet with blood, and placed it in the light cart of a charcoal burner, drawn by a very lean mule ; and they forced the peasant to bear it towards the city of Winchester, when, as he passed through a miry lane, the cart broke down and the corpse was hurled into the mire. So he left it for a time, got his cart mended, and returned for it. Soon afterwards, the Earl of Cornwall, who happened to be hunting in the wood, saw to his wild amaze a stag of immense size, who carried in his mouth the body of William Rufus. This was afterwards shown to be an hallucination ; but the charcoal-burner who conveyed the King's body to Winchester is said to have been named Purkess, and his descendants live in the neighbourhood now, never becoming richer or poorer than their ancestor. One of their lays is as follows :—

'And still—so runs our forest creed—  
Flourish the pious yeoman's seed,  
E'en in the self-same spot ;  
One horse and cart their little store,  
Like their forefathers—neither more  
Nor less the children's lot.'

Lord Palmerston referred to this in the course of a debate in the House of Commons in 1859."

## FAMOUS MEN AND WOMEN.

### THE BISHOP OF LONDON.

HERE are few persons more popular in the metropolis than the Bishop of London. He is respected almost as much by persons who dissent from his orthodox views as by his own followers. He has an enlarged view of Christianity; and though he does not say so in many words, he accepts the views of a learned Dissenting minister—"There are many roads which lead to heaven."

The Right Hon. and Right Rev. John Jackson, D.D., and one of Her Majesty's Privy Councillors, was born in 1811, and was the son of Henry Jackson, Esq., who lived in the county of Berkshire. Perhaps in early youth there were few indications of the great genius that the present Bishop of London is now known to possess. Up to the time when he matriculated at Pembroke College, Oxford, he obtained all his learning at Reading School; but no sooner did he enter the University than his genius was generally acknowledged; and when he graduated B.A. in 1833, his friends were by no means surprised to find that he was awarded first-class in classics. His collegiate career was short, for he soon determined to take holy orders, and the degree of M.A. was conferred upon him in 1836, in which year he was appointed Head Master of Islington School, which post he held until 1842. During the last four years of this period he also accepted the incumbency of St. James's, Muswell Hill. In 1846 he was appointed Rector of St. James's, Westminster, which he held for seven years, part of this time being also Canon of Bristol. He was also one of the Chaplains to Her Majesty from 1847 to 1855. In the latter year he was consecrated the eighty-sixth Bishop of Lincoln. He married, in 1838, Miss Mary Anne Firth, youngest daughter of Henry Browell, Esq., of Kentish Town, by whom he had a very numerous issue.

The Lincoln citizens respected their Bishop perhaps more than any of his predecessors. He exhibited a desire to promote their moral as well as their spiritual welfare, and was ready at all times to assist in any movement which would increase the comforts of the people or enable the poorer classes to see their way to advancement. He even studied agriculture, that he might be able to advise his poorer brethren how to make two blades of grass grow where one grew before: and he more especially advocated that accommodation should be provided in parish churches for the poorer classes, intimating sometimes in rather strong language that "before God all men were equal."

Quoting from a speech made on "Church Restoration and Church Arrangement," on the reopening of a church at Newark in April, 1855, whereat the Duke of Newcastle presided, after commenting upon the various efforts made in other districts where the clergy and their parishioners had joined to give increased accommodation, his lordship continues:—"I won't lead you to suppose that I think it of the same importance as their pastoral visits from house to house and room to room, bringing the Gospel into contact with individual souls on their sick beds, or the importance of well-conducted spiritual schools; but, notwithstanding, I do believe that the restoration of our churches, by making due provisions for public worship, is a great element in giving our Church a proper energy and force in winning back and retaining the affections of our people."

Some persons may object to a contest of this kind, where the Church endeavours to bring all into their own fold, but a very celebrated Dissenter has said: "I admire the energy, it matters not from what source it comes, which is exercised to bring a man or woman to accept the obligations of life. I admire any religion which makes a man more sober, more moral, and leads him to attend to domestic relations. These are the outward signs of visible faith, and it matters not whether he be Roman Catholic, Church of England, Baptist, Swedenborgian, Wesleyan, or other Non-conformist, so long as his moral life shows that he believes in a superior power to whom he shall account for his actions on earth."

Dr. Jackson certainly wished that all men should acknowledge his creed, but he never stooped to those in high position. Thus he says: "It is easy to say that the prayers of the Church are the same, and that the Gospel comes with the same power when heard on hard benches and in high corners as in the most comfortable pew; but our poorer brethren are the same flesh and blood as ourselves, and they feel the difference that has been made in our churches between them and their richer neighbours, and they feel it in a degree, too, which sometimes may provoke a smile. I recollect very well a parish where the circumstance that so many poor went to the chapel instead of the church was accounted for by the fact that at the chapel they gave them seats covered with red baize. These are, perhaps, not the highest motives; but, on the other hand, what right have we to put stumbling-blocks in the way of our poorer brethren?"

## Biographies of Famous Men and Women.

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### THE BISHOP OF LONDON.

The Bishop of London thinks in a Christian era international wars should never be permitted. He is not exactly a "peace-at-any-price" man, but he maintains that no nation is justified in going to war until all possible means of arbitration have been tried. In a sermon delivered in the Cathedral Church, Lincoln, he said : "War is a fearful evil, and to welcome it is no less presumptuous and mad than to welcome the earthquake or pestilence. It is one of the 'four sore judgments' which the Lord reserves in the treasury of His wrath to pour out on a land which 'sinneth against Him by trespassing grievously.' Nay, it is of all these the sorest ; and it was a wise and patriotic, as well as pious, choice of the aged warrior, who well knew all its evils, when in a great strait he had to choose between seven days of famine, three days of pestilence, or three months of flight before his enemies. 'Let us fall now into the hands of the Lord,' he said, 'for His mercies are great, and let me not fall into the hands of man.' I am not referring so much to the withering effects of war on the material prosperity of the nation, destroying as it does in a year the fruit of many, and contracting, if not closing, the channels which commerce has worked out for herself in time of peace—effects which probably have never been so deeply felt as they must be now in proportion to the vast increase of international trade, and to the growth of that great network, so to speak, of traffic, which ramifies over every land and sea, and through which wealth circulates over all the world, as life-blood through the body—effects, too, which *must* be felt eventually through every rank of society, though what in the upper grades is but the denial of a luxury or the curtailment of a comfort becomes in the lower penury, famine, and disease. Now I am limiting the view to the physical suffering which war must cause, and from which our sea-girt isle has 'been so long exempt that we are unable, perhaps, to estimate those miseries aright from which we somewhat too confidently believe ourselves secure. The carnage of the battlefield has drawn tears from the experienced warrior even in the first flush of victory—well it may. The ground is strewn with thousands of mangled corpses, which but just now were instinct with spirits, buoyant with life and energy, the noblest of God's works, capable of high thoughts and good deeds, of truth and love, of blessing and being blest ; and for most of those prostrate forms there will be hearts bleeding in some distant home, and the agony of bereavement sharper and sadder than the shock of the battle. The hospital, too, has its victims

as well as the combat ; and fatigue and pestilence slay as certainly, if less gloriously, than the sword. Meanwhile the march of an army must be tracked by the suffering it causes as well as endures. Even modern warfare, softened as its features are, must devastate. Terror, insult, loss, are not the worst evils it inflicts ; and when the blast has swept by, it has left many a quiet home a blackening ruin, and many a bosom aching with injuries which can never be redressed."

These, then, are the views of the Bishop of London on "Free and Open Churches," and on "Peace *versus* War;" but the great secret of his lordship's popularity is that kindly disposition, that happy geniality, that fatherly protection which seem inherent in his nature. The Bishop has been blest with twenty-one children, twenty being girls ; and when his eldest daughter married the present Venerable William Frederick John Kaye, now Archdeacon of Lincoln, in 1867, the Bishop would insist that the whole number of her sisters, some being mere infants, should be her bridesmaids, and the town of Lincoln was *en fête* on the occasion. Since that period seven of the daughters have married, and three only are recorded single, so that many must have passed away to that eternity to which the Bishop always points the way.

In 1869, when Dr. Tait was translated from London to the Archbishopric of Canterbury, Dr. Jackson was removed from Lincoln to London ; and in this great metropolis, where the power of one man can seldom be felt, the Bishop has been active in every kind work, the poor find in him a friend, and the timid a protector. Never have there been known so many lady candidates for confirmation in St. Paul's since the appointment of the present Bishop ; and it is said such is the confidence they feel in Dr. Jackson that these ladies travel many miles, and take up their abode for a short time in this city, in order that they may be confirmed by the present Bishop of London.

As a popular preacher, few Churchmen excel the Bishop of London in telling home truths in simple language ; and when in the summer time the nave of St. Paul's is opened free, the crowds who assemble when the right rev. gentleman is advertised to preach are oftentimes more than the building can contain. The efforts he has made throughout the whole of the Metropolitan diocese to enforce free seats in every church, on the principle that a national establishment must necessarily mean the poor man's church, will ever preserve for him a name, and reputation amongst the philanthropists of every age.

# DIANA'S VENGEANCE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "CHRIS CARDEN'S TRIALS," "NOT GOLDEN, BUT GILDED," ETC.

## CHAPTER I.

"She came to the village church,  
And sat by a pillar alone."



Ernest married and settled down in Cloverfield, and was as happy and contented as a man could possibly be ; while Sir Francis, instead of turning to his duties at home, became a fugitive and a wanderer on the face of the earth.

Now they had some tangible token of his presence in China ; again they received specimens of his success at diamond mining in the Cape ; they heard of him shooting buffalos in Arizona, seeking El Dorado in South America ; and then after an interval of months or years he would saunter up the avenue and enter the Vicarage as coolly as if he had only left it the night before, say good afternoon to Ernest and Madeline, and chuck the children under the chin, scarcely seeming to notice that there were more of them every time. At the end of a fortnight he would go away again, with the same apparent unconcern, and without any definite idea why he was going or where he was going to ; while Holm Hollow, nestling in the fertile valley, with its green meadows and royal woods fringing the swift river, was left to silence and desolation, its windows closely shuttered, its lofty halls draped with cobwebs, its broad staircases and corridors carpeted with the dust of years.

"Frank, will you never settle down, will you never give Holm Hollow a mistress and live at home ?" his cousin's wife would say sometimes ; and he, with a dreary unrest in his eyes, would reply lightly—

"Some day, perhaps, Madge." But year after year passed and he was still a wanderer.



HAT did you think of the service, Frank?—of the singing, I mean ? For a country church that *Tu Deum* was not so bad, was it ?" and the Rev. Ernest Holm smiled complacently as he walked up the path leading from the church to the Vicarage, with his cousin, Sir Francis Holm, of Holm Hollow. The Vicar was passionately fond of music ; and he certainly had done wonders with the poor materials he had to work on, so he wished to duly impress that fact on his cousin, in whose gift the living of Cloverfield was.

Frank and Ernest Holm had been schoolfellows and friends as well as cousins ; and on succeeding to the title and estate, the first thing Sir Francis did was to provide for the poor curate by giving him a good living.

It was after an unusually prolonged absence that he dropped in one Saturday afternoon just as the Vicar had finished writing his Sunday sermon. It was the middle of June, and the Vicarage garden was all aglow with roses, and fragrant with mignonette and heliotrope. It seemed to Sir Francis that the place had never before looked so pretty and restful as on that lovely summer day. The grey old church was half hidden in ivy, and a great vagrant "maiden-blush" rose climbed round the chancel window, while down below nestled the Hollow, by the river, its castellated towers rising above the trees. Far as the eye could reach were green fields, fertile pasture lands, heavy-foliaged woods, surrounding many a stately residence. It was indeed a pleasant picture; and Sir Francis paused a moment to admire it.

"Surely there is no place like home," he said aloud, "no spot on earth to compare with England."

"Then there is some hope of your favouring it with your presence a little longer," Mrs. Holm cried, advancing to meet him. "Dear, dear Frank, we feared you were not coming back any more."

"While I am alive, Madge, you may rely on my periodical visits, though, like comets, I appear at uncertain intervals," he said, as he followed her into the drawing-room, where Ernest joined them, welcoming his cousin in his usual hearty fashion. "Frank, old fellow, this is a surprise. I am delighted," and he wrung his hand. "Do you know I was beginning to fancy that something had happened—that you had come to grief somehow. Turn to the light, dear boy, and let me look at you."

Sir Francis turned round reluctantly. He was thin and very pale, and it seemed as if his thirty years sat very heavily on him. There were decided streaks of grey in his dark hair, and an almost melancholy expression in his large grey eyes.

"You're not looking well," the Vicar said gravely.

"I'm fagged out, that is all. I had a touch of malaria or something while in Italy, and Jennings, the English doctor in Rome, advised me—not at all professionally, you know—to come home, or at least go north; and so I am here. A week will set me up again." He spoke carelessly; but both Mr. and Mrs. Holm saw that he was making the best of his condition. Still, they were wisely silent, for Sir Francis hated to be fussed over; but he seemed genuinely glad to be with them, and as he sat in an easy chair after dinner,

and listened to Madge practising chants and voluntaries in the soft summer twilight, he envied his cousin Ernest his happy home.

The next day being Sunday, he went to church, and sat in the Vicarage pew; and when they came out Mr. Holm asked, not a little anxiously, what his cousin thought of the music, for his choir was one of Mr. Holm's especial weaknesses. "The *Te Deum* was fair, I think," he repeated.

"Yes, very good indeed," Sir Francis replied absently. "You have some sweet voices. Who was the lady that sat by the pillar in the middle aisle; did you observe her?"

"Of course I did; who could help observing a woman with such a magnificent voice? She sang superbly in the early part of the service; but she's a stranger. I never saw her before. Probably she's visiting somewhere—the Westwaters, most likely, or the Sampsons."

"Ah, yes, probably," and then Sir Francis was silent and apparently preoccupied. They understood all his moods and tenses thoroughly at the Vicarage, and when, after luncheon, he went out, no one suggested accompanying him, only Ernest, from his study-window, noticed that he went in the direction of Holm Hollow, a thing he rarely did, for the house was, for some totally inexplicable reason, hateful to him. He had never lived in it since he became its owner, and often said he never meant to.

For years Holm Hollow had been unoccupied. Sir Francis had inherited it from his grandfather, his own father having been killed in India, when the young heir was quite a baby. Old Sir Ernest was an eccentric, miserly, supremely disagreeable person, who had made his own wife miserable during the brief term of her life, for she died—many people said of his coldness and negative unkindness—after five years of married misery. Then the old master, as he was generally called, turned his attention to his only son, just growing up, and contrived to spoil his childhood and ruin his boyhood; and when Frank first of all made an imprudent marriage, and then exchanged into a regiment ordered on foreign service, no one was much surprised—though it occasioned a great deal of astonishment when Sir Ernest took his son's wife and child to live with him at the Hollow. It was during the early years of his childhood that Sir Francis took such a strange dislike to his home. His mother did not very long survive his father, and the solitary boy, left almost entirely to the care and management of his grandfather,

by whom he was alternately petted and punished, became wilful and imperious.

At Eton and Oxford he distinguished himself fairly, and for a boy so badly brought up, or rather for a boy who had not been brought up at all, his conduct was fairly good; but he steadily refused to enter the army, or adopt any profession, in spite of the fact that much of his grandfather's property was entirely at his own disposal, and the old man frequently threatened to leave his hoarded wealth to Ernest. His grandson, Frank, showed a very decided taste for literature, joined reading parties during his holidays, and formed all sorts of excuses for never going home. Once only Sir Ernest sent for him, and the result was a long and stormy interview, mutual reproaches and recriminations, ending in an angry parting. Frank returned to his usual avocations, vowing never again to enter Holm Hollow, and Sir Ernest betook himself to counting his money, and anathematising his ungrateful, unnatural grandson.

Five years after the old man died suddenly. His servant found him sitting in his library chair one morning, with a pen still grasped in his fingers, and a half-finished letter before him. It was to his grandson, and commenced violently. Evidently his last earthly thoughts of the young man were angry and resentful; in bitter terms he accused him of some offence, and reproached him with utter ingratitude and duplicity. "This last folly I never can and never will forgive you," the letter ran; and there it stopped, and old Sir Ernest Holm was called to his account, where his own trespasses were to be forgiven as he forgave those that trespassed against him.

The one great and unpardonable offence of Frank's life was his steady refusal to marry the lady selected for him by his grandfather. She was his cousin, Florence Dacre, a young, wealthy, handsome, clever woman, one in every way fitted to be his wife, and mistress of Holm Hollow; but though Frank liked and admired her, and was always more than delighted to meet her, it was in a purely cousinly way. He persistently refused to make love to her, or permit her to make love to him. She was the very last woman in the world he would care to marry, and he said so plainly, and his grandfather never forgave him.

And yet at the old man's death it was found that his grandson was his sole heir. Not to Florence whom he professed to love as if she were his own child, not to Ernest Holm, a poor curate in a remote country district, did he bequeath

the slightest token of remembrance; all his wealth, the accumulated savings of years of miserly caution, and mean self-denial, his wife's fortune, and the income that should have been his son's, all descended unconditionally to his grandson; and Sir Francis Holm found himself suddenly one of the wealthiest men in three counties.

He was in St. Petersburg on a diplomatic mission at the time, but he hastened home to attend the funeral and pay the last mark of respect to the memory of one who had all unwittingly, perhaps, but none the less surely, embittered his whole life. His stay at the Hollow was brief. As soon as the funeral was over the will was read; and as soon as Sir Francis had mastered the contents—which surprised him extremely—he made preparations for leaving England for a long period. No longer in need of pursuing a career, he gave up diplomacy, and expressed his intention of travelling. So the Hollow was draped in baize and calico, the servants dismissed, the estate put into the hands of an agent, and, just as soon as he had bestowed on his cousin Ernest the living of Cloverfield, fortunately vacant just then, he took his departure, leaving no address behind, and expressing his resolution of never making the hateful place his home.

The Vicarage garden sloped down the side of a hill to a point where it almost joined the park, and Sir Francis was soon in his own grounds, wandering through the easy woods, ankle-deep in cool moss and delicate, fragrant wild-flowers; but he walked on hurriedly, his steps keeping pace with his thoughts, his eyes blind to the beauty above, beneath, around him. At length he paused at the foot of a broad stone terrace, ornamented with large vases covered with moss—vases that once blazed with a glory of colour and foliage. Beneath was a square plot, termed the ladies' garden, now a mere tangle of weeds and briars, and overgrown with soft, damp moss. Sir Francis sat down on one of the terrace-steps, and looked from the shuttered windows of his home to the desolate garden below.

'Not a flower to be pressed of the foot that falls not;

As the heart of a dead man the seed-plots are dry;

From the thicket of thorns whence the nightingale calls not,

Could she call, there were never a rose to reply'—

he quoted sadly. "Empty as my life; desolate as my heart; neglected—as my duty. I wonder what has brought her here? Is it Fate, or Chance, or Destiny?

I wonder will she avoid me as she did at Rome? Who is she—what is she—where does she come from—and why, of all women in the world, should she have taken such a strange hold on my imagination? If she is visiting any one in the neighbourhood I can scarcely fail to meet her—if, indeed, she does not refuse point-blank to know me, as she did before; though *why* should she think it worth herwhile to avoid me? that's the point which puzzles me!"

Three months before, while in Rome, Sir Francis Holm heard every one talking about a Madame Mariotto—her beauty, her talents, her eccentricity. She was said to be an American, young, highly accomplished, a skilful musician, an artist of rising fame, and the novelist of the moment. Every one spoke of her books; and though many blamed, all read them: they were so unmistakably clever, keen, hard, brilliant, taking a cynical view of life for the most part, but displaying a profound knowledge of human nature.

Madame Mariotto was presumably a widow, for there was no Monsieur Mariotto; she lived alone in a free-and-easy fashion, had a studio in the Via Margherita, walked, rode, drove about in a Bohemian way, and yet was as difficult of access as the Pope in the Vatican. She visited some English friends on the distinct understanding that she was to come and go just as she pleased, and be introduced to nobody; and so cold and haughty was her manner to those who spoke to her casually at an afternoon tea or an "at home," that they never felt disposed to pursue the acquaintance any further.

Sir Francis Holm, amongst others, read and admired her books, and was much struck by her appearance, as well as fascinated by the mystery, or semi-mystery, that surrounded her. Who was she, where did she come from, why did she wrap herself in such a mantle of icy reserve and chilling hauteur? No one seemed to know; but every one admitted that she was charming.

Sir Francis used every effort to obtain an introduction, but in vain. She simply refused to know him, with an unhesitating want of ceremony peculiarly her own; and immediately afterwards she suddenly left Rome, retired to her villa on the shores of Lake Como, went back to America, to London, to Paris, to St. Petersburg—no one quite knew where.

Sir Francis Holm had an instinctive feeling that he was in some unaccountable, mysterious way connected with her sudden departure, though why he could not in the least determine. He knew nothing about

her, and she was palpably resolved not to know him; yet he felt rather than thought that she had left Rome on his account. It was mere physical weakness, a remnant of the malaria, that caused him to have such absurd fancies, he assured himself; he could not very well be in love with a woman he had never spoken to and seen seldom, but he certainly admired her immensely. A brilliant, cultivated, beautiful woman was to him the most adorable thing in nature; and Madame Mariotto's genius, grace, stately presence, and proud reserve—all took a very strong hold upon his imagination. For weeks he had thought of her persistently, in a vague, indefinite way. He seemed always to be wondering where she was, what she was doing, why she had refused to know him, and suddenly she appeared to him like a vision almost, sitting in his cousin's little country church, as proud, cold, beautiful, and unconcerned as ever. It seemed as if there was something more than mere chance in it.

"This won't do," he said aloud, after two hours' solitary musing on the moss-grown steps of the terrace. "I really must make an alteration in my habits. When I come to think of it it's not at all surprising that a sensible woman who lives and works should refuse to know an idle dreamer like myself. What possible interest could she take in a man who has never done anything—never even shown himself capable of doing anything? Why, the very stones of my home cry out against me, every grass-grown walk and weed-choked flower-bed is a reproach. I must see to all this, and make Holm Hollow fit for human habitation. Who knows but that I may see her sometimes if she is in the habit of visiting in the neighbourhood?

Then he walked home leisurely, wondering if he should see her at evening service; and all of a sudden it struck him as rather strange that he should have seen her there at all. In Rome, though she frequently visited the churches, she was said to have no religion at all, or rather to have invented a new religion of her own—a sort of modernised Paganism. Certainly she preached the worship of the beautiful in her books as if it were a creed she devoutly and personally believed in; and the somewhat cold and formal rites of the English Church could possess little charm for one accustomed to the glow, colour, ceremony, and enthusiasm of the South, and imbued with the mystic solemnity of the heathen mythology. It was only another of the many mysteries which surrounded this most attractive woman, and Sir Francis Holm possessed no clue to it.

## CHAPTER II.

'A woman sometimes scorns what best contents her.'

**A**FTER Holm Hollow, the most important place in the immediate vicinity of Cloverfield is Beechwood, the residence of the Westwaters, an old highly Conservative family much esteemed in the neighbourhood. Indeed, there was no more popular man in the county than Jack Westwater, and Lady Evelyn, his wife, was equally loved and admired by those who were fortunate enough to know her intimately.

Beechwood was always full of visitors—the best possible people; and Lady Evelyn's dinners, afternoon teas, and tennis-parties were considered perfection. Every one liked to go there; and to be on visiting terms at Beechwood was a guarantee of social distinction.

There were no more frequent guests than the Vicar and his wife; indeed, Mrs. Holm and Lady Evelyn were dear and intimate friends; therefore, when it transpired in the course of a day or two that Madame Mariotto was visiting the Westwaters, Sir Francis naturally felt that he could hardly fail to meet her; and in all probability she would not be so brusque when staying in a social English family as she had been while living at an hotel in Rome.

Already Sir Francis had expressed his intention of "doing up" the Hollow, and had written to an eminent architect to take the matter in hand.

Amongst the first to call upon him was Jack Westwater, and when he heard that he meant staying for some time he was genuinely delighted. "You must come and dine with us to-morrow—all of you," he said when leaving. "Evelyn is coming to see you in the afternoon, Mrs. Holm; but she charged me under threat of pains and penalties to give the message at once, lest you should be engaged. We have some charming people staying with us. Amongst others the celebrated Madame Mariotto, an out-of-the-way clever woman, and awfully handsome; but you saw her at church yesterday, I dare say. She is perfectly charming, and I'm certain you'll like her"—and so Jack rattled on, little dreaming how intensely interesting his words were to at least one listener.

"I shall see her to-morrow," Sir Francis said to himself, with a strange sensation at his heart—"sit at the same table with her, hear her speak, perhaps even be introduced to her. Lady Evelyn is the very soul and essence of good-nature; she will help me,

I'm sure. She will contrive to throw us together!"

Lady Evelyn meantime was having a little trouble with her beautiful visitor. When Madame returned from church on Sunday morning she went straight to her room, and did not appear at luncheon. Immediately after Lady Evelyn went up to see what was the matter, and found her maid busy packing, the contents of drawers and wardrobes strewn about in every direction, and Madame herself pacing about impatiently.

"Why, Diana, what on earth does this mean?" Lady Evelyn cried, pointing to a chaotic heap of wearing apparel. "What are you doing, Mason?"

"Packing, my lady!"

"Then stop packing for the present and go down to your dinner. My dear Di," when they were alone, "will you please explain the meaning of this sudden freak?"

"It simply means that I am going away, Eve," was the brief, resolute reply.

"My dear, pray don't be any more absurd than you can help," Lady Evelyn said, sitting down amid the contents of a hastily emptied wardrobe. "You came here to write your novel. You said you were getting on famously."

"So I was."

"And now, without rhyme or reason, you say you are going! My dear Di, eccentricity is interesting up to a certain point; after that it becomes monotonous!"

"I cannot help it, Evelyn. I *must* go. He is here!"

"Oh! is that it?"

"Yes. I saw him at church to-day, and he looked at me harder than ever, just as if he would read me through. Of course, I looked unconscious; but if I stay here I may be forced to meet him, and I cannot, I will not! So you see, dear, I must leave Beechwood."

"Where will you go?" Lady Evelyn asked, with a slight smile.

"I don't know—I don't care. Jericho, perhaps."

"Not nearly inaccessible enough. Every one goes to Jericho now-a-days; unfortunately, they don't all stay there. You really must not persist in running away in this headlong fashion, Di; and in refusing to meet Sir Francis you are really absurd."

"Oh, Eve, knowing everything, how can you be so cruel!" Madame cried, tears springing to her eyes.

"It is just because I do know everything that I am not cruel, dear. It is only you who are foolish."

"What would you do if you were in my place, Eve?" Madame asked, looking straight before her with a strange, wistful expression in her dark eyes. "Tell me, truly, dear, what would you do?"

"Do," Lady Evelyn said gravely, taking her friend's hand. "I will tell you, Diana. I would meet this man whom you say you hate so intensely; I would exert every charm I possessed to win his heart; I would dazzle him with my beauty—you are very beautiful, you know, Di; I would bewilder him with my cleverness, charm him with my sweetness—for you can be sweet too if you like; I would win his love, bring him to my feet, and then—"

"Spurn him, scorn him, throw back his love with contempt! It would be a grand revenge," Diana interrupted, standing up suddenly and looking majestic in the wrath and indignation into which she had worked herself. "Yes, it would be great, sublime; but I couldn't do it, Eve. I can only do one thing where he is concerned, and that is fly, put land and water between us as speedily as possible."

"And so become a sort of amateur Wandering Jewess," Lady Evelyn cried, a little impatiently. "The more I think of it, Diana, the more convinced I am that you are wrong. In this case discretion is not the better part of valour. You cannot leave Beechwood suddenly without causing much comment, and giving rise to many questions and criticisms. Every one knows you are here, and purposed remaining some time. Unfortunately, you are not like an ordinary woman who could come and go unquestioned and unmissed. Such is one of the penalties of greatness!"

"And one of the pleasures of such greatness as I have achieved is that I can come and go where I like; no one has any power to prevent me. I have at least made myself independent."

"No, dear, you are mistaken; no woman can be quite independent; but that's not the point. I maintain that you cannot leave us so suddenly without giving rise to many unpleasant remarks. Besides, Di, you have been promising me this visit for a long, long time!"

"Yes, I know, Eve; and if you had not written telling me that he had been away for so long, I should not have come now," Madame interrupted.

"That is woman's reasoning, Di; because he had been away so long was the more reason why he should return all the sooner," Lady Evelyn said, with a smile. "If you persist in what I cannot help thinking a mistaken notion, I shall certainly have cause to feel hurt."

"But am I safe, Evelyn?"

"Safe, dear! why, perfectly. Besides, you will have to meet the man some time, and it is one of those things that is as well now as again; better now, indeed, to have it over!"

"But why need we meet at all? Surely the world is wide enough for us two!"

"I am afraid it is not, besides, the thing is simply inevitable; sooner or later it will have to come to pass!"

"Oh, Eve, how hard, how cruel you are! How lightly and easily you talk!" Di cried passionately. "Have you no feeling, no pity for me at all?"

"Pity, Diana, for a woman like you! A woman with the courage of a lion, and the patience of a martyr—with a will of iron, nerves of steel!" Lady Evelyn cried, "Pity! no, dear, not an atom. Admiration, love, envy even, but no pity. The word seems strangely out of place in connection with you. When I think of what you have suffered, of the obstacles you have met and mastered, of the mountains of difficulties you have hewn down or toiled over, I am lost in wonder and admiration. But no one is perfect, I suppose; and the one weak point in your armour, Di, is your fear of Sir Francis Holm."

"Fear!" and a sudden fire leaped into her great dark eyes. "Fear, did you say, Evelyn? I was never afraid of any thing or any creature in my life. I often almost wish I was: it would prove, perhaps, that there was something human left about me!"

"My dear, do not try to delude yourself into the idea that you are a mass of granite or cast-iron, for you are not," said Lady Evelyn, throwing her arm affectionately round Diana's neck, and kissing her flushed, troubled face. "Theoretically you may be as marble-hearted as ever you please, and I grant that externally you are cold and hard; but that is mere veneer and varnish: underneath you are as soft as wax; and you know it, Diana. Now, then, ring for Mason to put your room to rights, and come downstairs. Don't think any more of running away, for, believe me, no one ever escaped their destiny by flight."

"I met my destiny long ago, and I have overlived it."

"Then you have nothing to fear, dear."

"Nothing from Fate, but much from myself. Still, Eve, I think on the whole I had better take your advice. Revenge is, perhaps, sweeter than ignominious flight."

"My dear, I never said one word about revenge. It is the vice of all others I detest," Lady Evelyn cried. "It was you

added that part. I would have finished the sentence very differently."

"Well, no matter. I will stay; but mind, Eve, whatever happens and comes of it, you must thank yourself."

"I don't anticipate anything very dreadful, Di. You will be a trifle haughtier, if possible, to Sir Francis than to any one else. You will look very beautiful, be supremely disagreeable, and feel intensely miserable. Now and again you will say something clever and sarcastic, and then draw back into your shell with an almost imperceptible shrug of your shoulders and curl of your lip. In conversation you will not shine, having made up your mind there is no one worth talking to. Sir Francis will make a few efforts to conciliate you, and then retreat in disgust, and probably fall in love with Eunice Talbot, just because she's such a complete contrast to you. That is the very worst I anticipate. Now come down and have some luncheon."

"Presently, Eve; I will follow you," and with a very well-pleased smile, Lady Evelyn left the room, having conquered so far as Madame's remaining was concerned, but feeling by no means satisfied as to her future conduct.

Lest alone, Diana Mariotto stood up before the mirror and studied her face attentively. "Can I bear it, I wonder? Can I go through with it?" she said, aloud. "Yes, why not? Have I not endured worse, infinitely worse, things? Have I not outlived a thousandsfold worse? and, after all, what does it matter? What can Diana Mariotto ever be to Sir Francis Holm? Nothing—less than nothing! And yet—suppose he should love me!" For a moment she stood motionless, scarcely daring to breathe, with a swift, sudden light in her eyes, a sudden warm colour on her face. "Suppose he should kneel at my feet some day, and offer me his heart—ask me to be his wife—what should I say? No, no, no! a thousand times," and then she burst into a bitter laugh at the very wildness and utter improbability of such a thing ever taking place.

And yet to be the wife of Sir Francis, the mistress of Holm Hollow, with a recognised name and place—to have home, love, friends, duties—to be safely anchored instead of drifting about the world like a derelict—the idea was not without its charms and attractions, even for the somewhat hardened and cynical woman of the world; but she laughed it to scorn.

"No," she said bitterly, "*my way of life* will fall into the sere and yellow leaf—

'And that which should accompany old age,  
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,  
I must not look to have, but in their stead'

—solitude, utter, absolute, loveless loneliness! But, after all, what does it matter? I would not have his love even if I could."

### CHAPTER III.

"Oh, how the spring of love resemblmeth  
The uncertain glory of an April day."

**N**EVER had Sir Francis Holm gone to a dinner-party with such strange sensations of hope and fear as when he went to Beechwood in accordance with Jack Westwater's cordial invitation. In spite of himself he was preoccupied, thinking incessantly what Madame Mariotto would say to him, and what he should say to her—for that he would have some opportunity of conversing with her he felt quite certain. He tried to picture their meeting, and failed signally, and then tried to satisfy himself as to why he thought so continually about it.

There were several ladies and gentlemen in the great drawing-room at Beechwood when the Vicarage party entered, many of them old acquaintances; but a single glance convinced Sir Francis that Diana was not there. Lady Evelyn introduced him to such of her guests as were strangers, and expressed her pleasure in the most cordial terms at hearing he was home for good, and hoped they would see him very often. "In fact, Sir Francis, you must come whenever Mr. Holm can spare you, for I want your advice and assistance. I am designing some new furniture for my boudoir, and 'the smallest suggestion is thankfully received,'" she said gaily.

"I think with such a powerful ally as Madame Mariotto you should not require any further hints whatever, Lady Evelyn," Sir Francis said, with a low bow.

"Gh, yes, I do. I want some Early English designs," Lady Evelyn replied.

"Ah, in that case I may perhaps be of some slight assistance to you; there are some tolerably good Early English specimens at the Hollow which may prove suggestive; but for myself I confess I am barbarous enough to prefer modern furniture."

"So am I, Holm," Jack Westwater cried energetically. "I like a good, capacious, leather-covered, spring-backed easy-chair, with plenty of stuffing, and next to that I declare an American rocking-chair is my ideal of comfort."

"How delicious it would be if every one could find their ideal so easily!" It was Madame Mariotto who spoke, in a low,

clear, musical voice, with the slightest possible inflection of scorn in it. She had entered the room quietly, and stood beside Lady Evelyn. Sir Francis, looking up, encountered the glance of a pair of wonderful dark eyes—black, brown, grey, dark violet, he could not determine; but he felt that they were beautiful, soft, and brilliant, and fringed with thick, dark lashes that curled defiantly. Madame was tall and slender, with a small head, well set on a round white throat, and magnificent shoulders. Her skin was very fair—strikingly so in contrast to her luxurious black hair, which rippled in natural waves from her broad, low forehead. All her features were perfectly regular, and with her cold, haughty, calm expression, she looked almost like a beautiful statue.

She wore a closely-fitting dress of black velvet that fell in heavy folds around her, and for ornament a single tea-rose, while her beautiful arms, bare to the elbow, were entirely devoid of jewels. Few women could dress with such classic severity as Madame Mariotto, and yet reign supreme even amidst crowds of other beautiful women tricked out in all the bravery of fashion, and shining resplendent with jewels; but then Madame was an artist, and knew the full force of physical beauty—knew how perfectly irresistible it is to the most cultivated minds.

"I have found my ideal!" Sir Francis said to himself, as he waited impatiently for Lady Evelyn to introduce him as she had already done for Ernest; but at that moment dinner was announced, and the Vicar had the pleasure of offering his arm to Madame, much to Sir Francis's disappointment. He had been thinking and hoping that she would have fallen to his lot, and he had reflected much on what he would say to her during dinner—whether she would be kind and gracious, or silent and haughty; but in any mood it would have been a happiness to sit beside her and look at her. It was an infatuation, a madness, a mania—this desire to be near a woman who never even bestowed a second glance on him! It was nothing short of idiotic, so he told himself, to find pleasure in the society of a person who regarded him with supreme indifference. Still, so it was.

To add to his annoyance, he had to take in Eunice Talbot. She was a fair, fashionably attired, wasp-waisted young lady, with large forget-me-not eyes and much frizzled raven hair, and very pretty scarlet lips. Eunice was considered a belle and a beauty, and resolved to make a conquest of that "good-looking, glum, morose Sir

Francis," as she termed him; but he proved somewhat unimpressionable: he was very grave, and in answer to her torrent of questions replied somewhat sarcastically that afternoon tea was vanity and lawn tennis vexation of spirit—said he detested garden-parties, that flower-shows were his abomination, and dancing his particular pet aversion. Such a dreadful want of sympathy and marked dissimilarity of taste proved too much for Eunice, so she shrugged her pretty shoulders and turned her attention to her neighbour on the other side, a dashing young captain, and compared notes with him on the past season and the various balls and parties they had been at, so fancying she was making Sir Francis feel out in the cold.

For a few moments he listened in amused silence to Eunice and the Captain. The subjects they discussed were evidently of the very first and deepest importance; and not to have been at the Duchess's garden-party or Lady Longfield's celebrated "at homes" was not to have lived in the proper sense of the word. Presently, with an amused smile, he also turned his attention to his next neighbour, an æsthetic young lady of forty or thereabouts, in a wonderful old-gold gown much puffed and pucker'd, and with a quantity of bewitched-looking, tawny-coloured hair floating wildly about her solemn face. Her serious absurdities were a little less exasperating than Eunice Talbot's vapid inanities—Swinburne and Oscar Wilde a trifle less irritating subjects than afternoon tea and tennis; and besides, while Miss Buncombe was monotonously discoursing in a low voice on the "earnest preciousness" of some very common-place commodities, such as plates and teapots, Sir Francis could look across the table at Madame Mariotto, and listen for the sound of her dear voice.

Ernest was a good talker, and was evidently exerting himself to please. The conversation, too, seemed very interesting; and Madame was listening attentively, turning her grave eyes on the Vicar occasionally with steady, questioning earnestness. Their conversation had drifted somehow towards theological questions, and Mr. Holm discovered that while professing to follow none, Madame was perfectly familiar with all creeds and forms of religion and worship, and was well-read in the rites of the earlier Pagan ceremonials. From religion they drifted to music, and the Vicar asked what she thought of the singing at his little church.

"It was sweet and true," she replied, glad to be able to honestly praise; "but

of course it wanted power. Still, I confess I was agreeably surprised. In many country churches the singing is simply intolerable ; there seems to be no melody no harmony, no praise in it. But the ritual of your English Church is cold, Mr. Holm it appeals little, if at all, to the senses !"

"But, Madame, we do not want to appeal to the senses, only to touch the heart," the Vicar replied earnestly. "We try to make religion a reality, not a show."

"Ah, if you had studied human nature as closely as I have you would know that the surest and nearest way to reach the heart is through the senses. The old Pagans knew it, the Catholics know it. Believe me, Mr. Holm, religion, like every thing else now-a-days, to be thoroughly enjoyed must be made pleasant."

"Paganism, Madame—rank Paganism !" the Vicar said with a smile, rising as Lady Evelyn stood up. "I shall ask a boon presently, Madame—you sing, and I love music !"

She smiled at him, and Sir Francis wondered as he saw how rarely sweet her smile could be ; then she nodded her head as she passed out, and Ernest construed the gesture into a promise to sing for him—he was longing to hear her voice alone, wondering what style of music she liked.

Sir Francis marvelled what subject they had been discussing so eagerly—wondered, too, if he would ever have an opportunity of speaking to her in the same familiar fashion. The dinner had seemed interminable, and the gentlemen remained much longer than usual in the dining-room. They all had so many questions to ask the baronet—so many congratulations to offer on his settling-down "for good," as they termed it. There were hints, suggestions, warnings as to covers, preserves, keepers, &c., hardly a word of which he comprehended, for his thoughts were elsewhere ; and Jack Westwater, the M.F.H., grew positively eloquent on the glorious "runs" they would have, for it was a hunting neighbourhood.

"Though I suppose, Frank, after your sport abroad you won't care for our national pastime ?" he finished.

"Oh, yes, I shall. Small game will be a treat after tigers, bears, and buffaloes ; but I confess I am a little sick of both hunting and shooting."

"There is lots of game at the Hollow, though," Jack Westwater remarked ; and then the conversation turned on purely local matters, dogs, keepers, poachers, petty sessions—all of which were supposed to be of absorbing interest to the non-

resident proprietor of a large estate, but which in truth bored him supremely.

At last some one rose from the table, and Sir Francis and the Vicar, Captain Caulford, and young Lord Lucerne, Lady Evelyn's brother, rose too, with alacrity. Jack Westwater smiled and waved his hand—he had no intention of leaving the dining-room till his bottle of claret was finished ; and a few old fox-hunters drew closer to the table and prepared to enjoy themselves.

Meanwhile the ladies were yawning in the drawing-room, despite their hostess's efforts to keep them entertained. It is a fearfully stagnant hour, that between leaving the dining-room and the advent of the gentlemen. Ladies who are too young to indulge in the luxury of a nap, and too sleepy to talk, don't know what to do with themselves, and are cross and snappy ; very young ladies wonder why Fred and Harry stay drinking horrid wine when they might be chatting comfortably in some remote, quiet corner, or wandering in the dimly lighted conservatory ; sensible women shut their eyes, have their "forty winks," and feel all the better for it. Madame did, but she could sleep without nodding, snoring, opening her mouth, or looking idiotic ; and, moreover, she could wake at a moment's notice. The opening of the drawing-room door caused her to open her eyes ; and when the Vicar made his way to one side of her chair and Lord Lucerne by a more circuitous route to the other, she was wide awake, and looking as if she had not closed her eyes for a moment.

Sir Francis found himself seated in a corner alone, and he began moodily turning over the pages of an album, his eyes however, watching the group round Madame's chair. Presently Lady Evelyn approached and sat down beside him.

"You look weary, Sir Francis. Madeline has told me you have not been well. I fear you have over-exerted yourself in coming here," she said kindly.

"Not at all. I have been severely quiescent ; and, besides, I am really quite well now. Lady Evelyn, I wish you would introduce me to Madame Mariotto."

"Certainly, with pleasure," Lady Evelyn said, rising. "Come along. I am surprised you have not met her as you have been so much abroad."

"I have seen her, but never was fortunate enough to procure an introduction," Sir Francis replied, as he followed Lady Evelyn across the room.

Madame stood up just as they approached her, and bowed graciously enough as Sir

Francis was introduced. "Mr. Holm has beguiled me into promising to sing something," she said.

"Then Mr. Holm is a very fortunate man to possess such powers of persuasion. It is more than I could do," Lady Evelyn replied ; and then they all moved towards the piano, Madame and Ernest in advance, Lucerne and Sir Francis following, each looking as if he heartily envied the Vicar his good fortune, while Ernest himself seemed most provokingly conscious of it.

Sitting down, Madame struck a few soft, melancholy, minor chords, and then sang the first words that came into her head, to an accompaniment of her own.

" For a day and a night Love sang to us, played with us,

Folded us round from the dark and the light ;  
And our hearts were fulfilled of the music he  
made with us,

Made with our hearts and our lips while he  
stayed with us—

Stayed in mid passage his pinions from flight  
For a day and a night.

" But his wings will not rest and his feet will not stay for us ;

Morning is here in the joy of its might ;  
With his breath has he sweetened a night and a  
day for us,

Now let him pass and the myrtles make way  
for us ;

Love can but last in us here at its height  
For a day and a night."

There was perfect silence for a few moments when she had finished, then each thanked her in the usual fashion. Sir Francis alone was silent ; he could not have uttered a word to save his life ; but his eyes were fixed on her with a strange, troubled, questioning expression. Every note of her marvellous, highly cultivated voice thrilled him like an electric shock. The words she had sung were painfully familiar, and recalled events in his past life of which she could have no possible knowledge. He remembered another voice—oh, how unlike hers—though once he fancied it possessed a certain sweetness reading the verses to him and laughing at their utter absurdity. He laughed too, though he found out later on that they possessed a certain bitter reality.

This woman, as unlike that other woman, as day is unlike night, reminded him of her in a dreamy, uncertain way, and he felt troubled and perplexed ; and yet they were only shadows, dim, dusty, dead-and-gone shadows that were crossing his brain ; but why should she in her stately beauty conjure up the ghosts of utter nothingness ?

She was singing again now, a popular ballad, but the refrain of it was to the same purpose—

" Oh, love for a year, a week, a day,  
But alas ! for the love that loves alway."

Sir Francis repeated it over to himself and smiled a little bitterly, as he stood watching Madame intently. She sang easily, naturally ; her powerful voice was perfectly under control ; but there was a semitone of scorn in it, as if she felt nothing but contempt for people who could not love always. Then she stood up and passed into the fernery with Lord Lucerne, and somebody else took her place at the piano ; but Sir Francis still heard only the ring of her voice, saw only her pale, passionate, upturned face, and like a man in a dream he moved away.

She had not been either glad or sorry to make his acquaintance ; she had treated him precisely as he had seen her treat several other gentlemen ; but he felt as if there was some invisible barrier between them, some opposite forces at work—one drawing him towards that mysterious, attractive woman, the other thrusting him back. Presently he escaped from the drawing-room into the moon-lit garden to smoke a cigarette, and as he leaned with folded arms over the stone balustrade of one of the terraces, he tried to think calmly of all the events of the evening.

" I love her," he said to himself. " Yes, there is no longer any doubt about it—I love her ; but whether for weal or woe, good or evil, happiness or misery, I know not, time alone can tell that ; but I love her, and will do all that in me lies to win her ; for apart from her there is no peace or happiness for me ! "

Late that night, in the solitude of her room, Diana Mariotto gazed long and earnestly at her reflection in a tall mirror, and seemed to be studying her face, feature by feature. Suddenly she turned away with a low cry, and burst into a passion of bitter tears. With everything in the world calculated to make her happy, she felt that night a supremely wretched woman. Still she did not waver for a moment in her purpose, still she resolved to carry out the task she had set herself to perform, though it seemed even then that the game was scarcely worth the candle.

#### CHAPTER IV.

" He either fears his fate too much  
Or his deserts are small,  
Who waits to put it to the touch  
And win or lose it all."

" JACK, I'm off. I can't stand this any longer!"

" Off ! where to ? what for ?  
what on earth do you mean,

Luce?" Jack Westwater cried, staring at his brother-in-law in sheer amazement. "Leave Beechwood three days before the twelfth! why, you certainly must be 'off top,' old fellow!"

"I believe I am," Lord Lucerne groaned. "'Pon my honour, Jack, I don't know what I've been doing with myself for the last six weeks."

"Neither do I. I haven't seen anything of you, that's very certain. You've been writing poetry, I do believe," with a cautious glance round.

"Worse, Jack—infinitely worse," Lord Lucerne replied, with a smile. "Poetry, after all, is a comparatively harmless pastime."

"Is it?" Jack interrupted, with a shudder. "I was in love with a girl once who gave her mind to poetry, and what I suffered! If she wanted a piece of bread, she asked for it in blank verse, and spoke to the very servants in hexameters or inverted commas; but go on, what have you been doing?"

"Burning myself, Jack. Falling hopelessly in love with Madame Mariotto; and she doesn't care a rap about me, and I'm confoundedly cut up about it, I can tell you."

"But, my dear Luce, that's the exact condition of every man on the premises. They are all in love with her, and she doesn't care a rap about them; but that is no reason why they should all bolt and make fools of themselves, is it? Besides, did not Evelyn tell you distinctly and plainly *not* to fall in love with Madame, because she could not or would not marry you? Did she not intimate that there was an objectionable husband in the background——"

"But she might get a divorce, Jack," Luce interrupted with abject eagerness.

"I suppose she might if she wished, but evidently she does not. However, that is her business entirely, not yours or mine; and I think it very bad form of you to say anything to her after what Eve told you."

"I could not help it, Jack."

"Oh, bosh! I have no patience with a fellow who runs against a stone wall with his eyes open, and does a thing just because he is told not; and then to talk of going away when everyone else is just crazy to come, and the *bairns* in capital condition, too. I never heard such nonsense in the whole course of my life," Jack said irritably. "You are making an awful fool of yourself, Luce."

"Possibly, Jack," Lucerne replied quietly; "but all the same, I'm off to Paris. It is the only kingdom of Avilion I know

of where I can heal me of my grievous wound. I could stand being refused, you know, and severely snubbed into the bargain, but to see another fellow step in quietly and win where I failed, that's more than any one could calmly endure. I do believe she likes that fellow Holm."

"I should not be surprised; he is not at all a bad-looking fellow, and has ten thousand a year," Jack replied, with a droll smile; "but there's still the objectionable husband in the background, you know; and Di won't go in for a divorce. Halloa, Frank, how are things getting on at the Hollow?"

"Famously. I have turned the last workman out and got rid of the *débris*, and now I want Lady Evelyn to come and wave her magic wand over the rooms. The furniture is all there. Leroy has been punctual; but there seems to be too much or too little of something, and there is a mathematical precision about the arrangement of the chairs and tables that is painful to a degree; so I have come to beg a contingent of ladies to drive over and make the place look habitable for me. I have brought the drag, so go and look up some recruits for me, Jack. You will come, Lucerne? Your assistance will be invaluable in the smoke-room. I will give you an impromptu luncheon, and then we can have a look at the covers while the ladies examine my belongings."

At that moment Lady Evelyn and Madame Mariotto entered the great hall from the garden, Diana with her hands full of lovely tea-roses. Sir Francis looked at them and smiled; he knew her favourite flower. When Lady Evelyn heard the object of his visit she consented at once; they had no engagement that morning, and were all consumed with curiosity to see the house they had heard a good deal about. Of the original party visiting at Beechwood when Sir Francis returned, there were only Diana, Lord Lucerne, Eunice Talbot, and Miss Buncombe; but half a dozen others eagerly begged permission to join in the party.

"Of course we cannot do without you, Miss Buncombe," Jack Westwater cried merrily. "Your aesthetic taste is absolutely indispensable, all Sir Francis's furniture being of the 'greenery-gallery Grosvenor-gallery' type."

The drag was soon full, with Jack Westwater and Eunice Talbot on the box-seat, Lord Lucerne at first seemed inclined to remain at home, but Lady Evelyn pushed him in before her; and, as he anticipated Diana following in a moment, he was passive.

"I must call at the Vicarage for Madeline and her sister, and, perhaps, Ernest may join us. How are we to manage for room, Lady Evelyn?" Sir Francis said, as he saw the drag fill up.

"Why, order the carriage, of course." "Williams"—to a servant standing near—"tell James to bring the open carriage round as quickly as possible. You can go in it, Sir Francis, and some one else, and pick up all the Vicarage people. Diana," to Madame, who that moment appeared on the steps, "will you go with Sir Francis to call for Mrs. Holm, or shall I?"

"Oh, I don't mind, just as you like," was the careless reply; but Lady Evelyn was already seated in the drag; and to prevent one of those interminable feminine discussions, Jack Westwater touched up the horses and off they went, leaving Madame and Sir Francis standing on the broad steps waiting for the carriage to come round.

He could not see whether she looked pleased or annoyed, for she held her dainty, lace-bordered sunshade before her face; but his heart was beating furiously, and his eyes beaming with triumphant happiness. Fate had been kinder to him than he had dared hope at the very outset. He only hoped that Fortune would continue to smile on him all day, for it was to be a very momentous one in his life. He had made up his mind to learn his fate that day.

It was barely ten minutes' drive to the Vicarage, and Sir Francis wondered how he should make the most of it; but before they got out of the grounds of Beechwood they saw Mrs. Holm and her sister, Katie Garnet, coming across the lawn, evidently bent on a morning call. Madame smiled under the shelter of her sunshade, and then involuntarily breathed a deep sigh of relief. The moment she longed for, yet dreaded, was at hand, and she was glad of a respite.

Sir Francis sighed too, and smothered an exclamation of impatience. However, he alighted and told Mrs. Holm of his plans, and in another minute she was seated in the carriage beside Madame, he and Katie opposite. It was certainly very provoking that the opportunity he had so long sought should be lost—provoking, too, that she should look so triumphant over it. It seemed to him as if she quite enjoyed his disappointment. On his side the drive was a silent one; but the ladies chatted away energetically. Diana quite unbent, and asked a variety of questions about the village-schools, poor people, and things generally in Cloverfield. Then Katie burst out occasionally into enthusiastic praises of the landscape; and so, between them,

they kept the conversational ball rolling till they came up with the drag at the entrance to the Hollow.

It was only two months since Sir Francis had walked from the Vicarage through the tangled undergrowth of ferns and brushwood, and sat on the ruined terrace contemplating the "Forsaken Garden." Then all was silent, solitary, desolate, neglected; now the terrace was restored, the vases replaced, the ladies' garden below laid out in orderly beds. Shrubs were growing, flowers in pots blooming, the windows of the rooms were open, and the warm August sun shone on the clear glass and snowy blinds. It seemed as if a magician's wand had been swept over the place, transforming it into a pleasant, bright home where human beings might live and be happy. Money, energy, skill, and taste had all been unsparingly employed, and the result was amazing.

"It would have taken me years to get through all that, Frank," Jack Westwater said, as he stood on the broad stone steps and glanced round. "When I was here last the place was a howling wilderness, and now it's a little Paradise. But you always were fearfully and wonderfully energetic when you took a thing into your head."

It was Diana's first visit to Holm Hollow, and she glanced round curiously, with a sort of puzzled, expectant look which did not escape Lady Evelyn; but she was very silent and reserved. While others were loud in their praises of everything, paint, paper, dados, carving, colouring, she did not utter a word; and during luncheon she was even more silent than usual. Sir Francis addressed more than one remark to her, but her answers were brief and cold; and Lucerne began to look a little more cheerful. Perhaps Sir Francis might not be any more successful than himself, after all, and that would be some small consolation.

When luncheon was over, the gentlemen made direct for the smoke-room; the ladies, under the guidance of Madeline, went to inspect the drawing-rooms, and try if they could not superintend the better arrangement of the furniture. The rooms certainly looked stiff and formal, but they had every capacity for improvement. The alteration of a chair here, a table there, the better disposal of a screen or a flower-stand, the replacing of cushions, hassocks, and other "unconsidered trifles," and then the adjustment of the blinds to shade the room without darkening it, made a wonderful alteration. Diana smiled as she sat apart, taking no share in the alterations; and Miss Buncome, on a low ottoman, sat

with folded hands and upturned eyes, remarking at intervals that it was all "too earnestly precious."

The furniture was certainly beautiful and precious too, as doubtless it cost a great deal of money. The prevailing tone was pale amber, with a rich brocade pattern outlined in a darker shade—curtains, carpet, panelled walls, frescoed ceiling, and furniture harmonised and blended without being the same monotonous pattern over and over again. When everything was finished, even to putting some scarlet geraniums and waving fronds of fern in the specimen glasses, Lady Evelyn looked round approvingly.

"It certainly is a charming room," she said, drawing back the amber *portière* that they might work their will on the further apartment; "and Frank has displayed exquisite taste."

"Yes, it is a lovely room," replied Eunice Talbot, looking round critically; "but just suppose Sir Francis should marry a fair woman—me, for instance—how would it be then? I should have to turn all this yellow business out of the window, and have pale blue instead."

"Sir Francis will have to live up to his drawing-room," replied Lady Evelyn; "and marry up to it, so there's a chance for you, Miss Buncome!"

"I declare, I never thought of that!" cried Eunice. "Don't stir, Miss Buncome, you really look quite a part of the fittings; I never saw anything so in harmony in all my life."

"We will never get through all those rooms if we do not make haste," Mrs. Holm said, hurrying along; and they all followed her except Diana, who sat quite still and silent in her corner, with a scornful smile on her lips. After a few minutes Sir Francis entered the room and stood beside her.

"Are you weary, Madame, or are you not sufficiently interested in my poor belongings to care to look at them?" he asked, with the faintest semitone of reproach in his voice. "If it will not tire you too much," he continued, more earnestly, "I should like to show you one or two rooms myself. Will you come?"

Without a word she stood up and accompanied him. She knew that the moment had come when she would have to listen to him and answer him, for she saw in his face that he was about to tell her that he loved her, and ask her to be his wife. Silently she walked up the grand staircase, with its heavy carved oak balustrades and quaint armorial devices, and along a broad corridor to a wing fronting

the south, built at a much later period than any other portion of the house. Taking a key from his pocket, Sir Francis unlocked a door and led the way into a small anteroom which opened into another room with a large bay window—a room that looked like a poet's dream or a fairy picture, with its delicate ivory-tinted walls, and furniture upholstered in ivory satin with roses hand-painted for decoration, a soft, creamy carpet strewn with flowers, a few exquisite water-colours, two of Greuze's bewildering faces, a few rare statuettes, a table in the window embrasure with a Sèvres tea-service—everything, in short, that the most perfect taste and unlimited wealth could command. This was the tea-room; beyond, and separated by a satin *portière*, painted with trailing sprays of roses, was a boudoir, and in the same suite dressing, bed, and bath rooms, all opening separately on the south corridor, and all furnished with the same exquisite taste and lavish luxuriance.

Madame was surprised in spite of herself. Even her keen critical eye could discover no fault or flaw anywhere, and she freely expressed her great admiration. "Did you choose this furniture yourself, Sir Francis?" she asked, looking at the delicate wild-rose which seemed to be thrown carelessly on a chair-back.

"Yes—that is, I designed it, and had it made to order. Everything in these rooms has been planned by myself. I am so glad you are pleased with them."

"One could hardly fail to be, I think," she replied, with another glance round. "Indeed, they seem to me to be quite perfect."

"Then I am more than repaid, for I did it all for you, Madame Mariotto, for your pleasure, your approval. Don't turn aside, Madame. Diana, you must listen. You know, you must know, that I love you—that ever since I saw you I have had no thought save of you, no desire except to win you; and surely, surely, my hopes and dreams have not been all in vain!" he cried, with a quiver of anxiety in his voice. "You have let me love you," he continued passionately, "you have smiled oh me, seemed happy in my society. Oh, darling! I love you, how much I cannot tell you, for I cannot tell myself; but it seems to me that without you life is not worth living! Darling, will you be my wife?" He had taken her hand, he was kneeling at her feet, gazing with passionate earnestness into her face for some sign of love, or pity, or tenderness, but there was none. She was pale and cold as marble, almost as still save for a faint quiver of her lips.

"You did all this for me?" she said at length, looking round.

"For you, darling, for you only. There is nothing in the world I would not do for you, for I love you."

"I am very sorry, Sir Francis," she said, and her voice quivered in spite of all her efforts to steady it. "I am sensible of the honour you have done me, but I cannot be your wife; and another time," with a sudden blaze of scorn and anger, "perhaps it would be as well to secure the consent of the lady before you fit up a residence to suit her. The colours you have chosen here are peculiar; few women would admire them."

"I only thought of you," he said humbly, not noticing her ungracious sneer; "I only wanted to give you pleasure. Darling, if you knew how I love you, how earnestly I would strive to be worthy of you! Oh! why did you let me love you, if you could not care a little—ever so little about me in return!"

"It is not a question of caring, Sir Francis," she said, touched in spite of herself by his humble earnestness. "If I cared, as you say, ever so much, it would make no difference. I suppose you are not aware that my husband is still living?"

"Your husband living! Surely no! Oh, Madame, why did you not tell me this before?" he cried. "Could you not have spared yourself and me this? But forgive me, I am mad—I do not quite know what I am saying." Then, with sudden eagerness—"You do not love, you do not live with him, only say you care a little about me, and that is not an unsurmountable difficulty. He might consent to set you free if you only give me the right to demand it."

"Pardon me, Sir Francis, I have no desire to be set free," she said coldly; "and I have no affection to bestow on anybody. Please do not pursue the conversation any further; it is painful and useless." Then, with another critical glance round the room—"It's a trying colour, Sir Francis; you might better have chosen pink or blue!"

Without a word, without seeming even to notice her taunts, he led her out of the room and locked the door after her, then conducted her to the library, where some of the ladies were already assembled. He was dimly conscious of a sudden gloom having fallen over the house, of a sudden dark shadow having fallen across his path. The golden glory of the August day had departed for him; but the sight of his visitors recalled him to himself, and he was again the courteous host.

"How about the tea-room?" Eunice Talbot cried, "aren't we to see that, Sir Francis?"

"Not to-day, Miss Talbot. It is not complete yet; its chief ornament is still wanting. When I have secured that you shall not only see it, but have tea there; and pending that good time, Symonds says tea is served in the small drawing-room, so I propose we adjourn thither."

"I wonder if he still thinks he will win me?" Diana said to herself. "I wonder if he will ask me again? I am afraid if he had pressed me much further I should have broken down. Oh, dear, what a heartless, hardened coquette he must think me!"

Sir Francis played his part to the last. After tea he walked through the gardens and greenhouses with them, saw them all into the carriages, and witnessed their departure, standing bareheaded on the terrace, with a pleasant smile. He had declined Lady Evelyn's pressing invitation to return with them to Beechwood, and Madeline's equally urgent request that he would dine at the Vicarage, on the plea that he had letters to write, and some pressing business to attend to. When the last carriage disappeared down the avenue, he returned to his solitary house, from which all the glory had departed, and going straight to the library, locked himself in to think calmly over what had occurred.

His first impulse was to leave Holm Hollow without an hour's delay; his next to meet his fate bravely, as a man. Diana had been cruel—wilfully cruel and heartless; the more he thought of it the more convinced he felt of that. She certainly had tolerated, if not absolutely encouraged, his attentions. She had led him to think that his presence was a pleasure to her. She had, in short, allowed him to make love to her, and to love her—two very different things—well knowing that she had nothing to give in return, and that what had been mere pastime to her had been the most serious crisis of his life to him.

Yes, undoubtedly she had treated him badly, and there was a time when he would have indulged in morbid fancies, hugged his misery, and escaped from the eyes of pitying or contemptuous friends. Now he was wise enough to stand his ground, and face his disappointment like a man; but it was none the less bitter on that account, and in his utter loneliness and solitude it seemed doubly hard to bear. Besides, everyone knew he had prepared Holm Hollow for a mistress, and a mistress of

some sort it should have before very long, he said to himself, with a bitter smile. "Since I cannot have her, what does it matter whom I marry? Doubtless there are many ladies who will be quite willing, in consideration of my title and fortune, to dispense with the troublesome luxury of a heart."

## CHAPTER V.

"Alas! the love of woman! it is known  
To be a lovely and a fearful thing!"

"*I* DON'T think I ever spent so wearying a day in my life," Madame Mariotto said, when they reached Beechwood. "It is so supremely uninteresting looking at other people's houses. Will you excuse me, Evelyn, if I lie down? I really do not feel equal to dressing for dinner."

"As you like, dear. I shall send you up something," and Lady Evelyn hurried to her room, as the first dressing-bell had already rung. When the echo of high-heeled shoes ceased on the stairs, and the gong sounded, Diana felt herself comparatively free from intrusion, and, throwing herself on the couch, buried her face in the cushion, and sobbed bitterly.

"Oh! how could I be so hard, so cruel! How could I have the heart to treat him so! Why did I not spare myself this last, worst pain of all?" she cried wildly. "How he must hate, scorn, despise me! How I hate and scorn myself! Oh, why did I not die when they said I did! Why was I born at all! What has life been to me but one long, living mockery; and yet, fool that I am, did I not promise myself this? did I not vow to be revenged? Now I have it, and, like all else, it has turned to dust and ashes in my mouth. Surely we are our most pitiless enemies; ourselves and our passions torture us more than our foes!"

There was a time when Diana Mariotto thought very differently—a time when revenge for real or imaginary wrongs seemed to her the sweetest thing on earth; but that was when she was young, ignorant, uncultivated. Thought, study, culture, had so enlarged and enriched a naturally noble mind that she could not entertain a mean or unworthy thought, or do an ignoble action, without feeling a fierce self-contempt and self-abasement. Now she felt she had not treated Sir Francis Holm well, looking the facts fairly in the face. She had given him some encouragement; she knew he believed her, as others did, to be a widow. She had walked with him through the shady glades of Beechwood, sang to

him, idled during the long sultry July evenings on the terrace with him, listening to his stories of foreign countries, his adventures in all parts of the world, hearing him read, in a low, musical voice, their favourite authors, discussing with him art, literature, every topic of interest, and discovering every day new treasures in his richly cultivated mind. She had shown by countless little signs and tokens, simple in themselves, but to such a man, and coming from such a woman, "confirmations strong as proofs of Holy Writ," that he was not indifferent or uninteresting to her. She had smiled on him, allowed her fingers ever so gently to retain, if not return, the pressure of his; in short, she had flirted with him, amused herself through the long summer days; and when he loyally told her of his love, she threw it back with scorn and contempt, though, like the base Indian, she threw a pearl away richer than all its tribe.

She had done all this wilfully, knowingly, and of set intent and purpose, and now came the reaction. She was angry, humiliated, fiercely ashamed of herself. But the thing was done and could not be undone, and he doubtless despised her even more than she despised herself.

But to succumb to any feelings or emotions whatever, or be the victim of depression for any length of time, was not in the nature of Diana Mariotto. Her strength of will and force of character were such that she could command almost any state of mind, or the perfect semblance of it; and when Lady Evelyn came into the room after dinner, she found her sleeping calmly and quietly as a child.

"I really believe she was only tired," her ladyship said to herself as she sat in a low easy chair beside the couch, and looked curiously at the lovely face, so perfect in its outline and colouring—so free from a shadow of thought or care, "and I was foolish enough to fancy that she was *feeling*, but I believe she has educated herself beyond that common-place sentiment."

"I believe I have, dear," Diana said, opening her eyes slowly, "and a very good thing too. I do feel ever so much better for my sleep," and she sat up, looking certainly quite bright, and without a trace of her former emotion.

"I am so glad, dear. How did you become so tired? You are not used to sensations of that sort; and really you know you did not walk much," Lady Evelyn said, looking curiously at her friend.

"I sat about too much. I suppose I was bored—that is the truth."

"How did you like the Hollow, Di?

Don't you think Sir Francis has shown admirable taste?"

"Not bad; but there is too much yellow about. There are very few people it would suit."

"I think he had only one person in his mind's eye," Lady Evelyn remarked.

"So I should imagine; and in fact I told him so. He pleaded guilty, and was good enough to say that I was the individual—in fact Sir Francis did me the honour of laying his hand, and heart, and fortune, at my feet; and I declined with the customary, though not very consolatory, thanks."

"Oh, Diana, are not you satisfied yet?"

"Satisfied! no—what woman ever is? Don't be absurd, Eve, if you can help it. Satisfied! What have I got, a profession of love, a proposal of marriage—and one more or less, what does it matter?"

"Not much to you, but everything to Sir Francis. He loves you, I believe, truly."

"I hope so. When I informed him of the existence of a husband, he suggested a divorce. He would be willing to marry me even under those most disadvantageous circumstances, so I suppose he does care something about me."

"Dearest, what more would you have?" Lady Evelyn cried earnestly.

"Much! I would have him suffer; I would wring his very heart; I would conjure up visions of the past; I would have him feel the misery he inflicted!"

"And then," Lady Evelyn said sadly, "what is to become of him and you?"

"I really have no pleasure in conjecturing, Eve. For myself, when I leave here at the end of next week, I shall not come in your way again for a long time; and your dear little head will not be perplexed with my contrary ideas. I am sure I am a perpetual worry to you."

"In one sense yes, dear. I long so earnestly to see you happy."

"And who says I am not happy? Have I not everything—youth, health, wealth, fame, beauty—everything?"

"There's one thing wanting, dearest Di, without which all the rest is mere vanity and vexation of spirit. One other word I would say, even at the risk of offending you. I really don't think you have treated Sir Francis quite well."

"Well! who ever treats me well?" Diana cried, starting to her feet and pacing the room impatiently. "Doesn't every man I meet think he is privileged to make love to me and talk philandering nonsense to me? Can I be decently civil to any man without being pursued—positively pursued—Eve? Look

at your brother: he knew how I was situated; he knew I had no heart, no love, no substitute for love to bestow—did that prevent him from making love to me? Not in the least! Do not talk to me, Eve, about treating people well. I never could treat men half as badly as they deserve!"

"I think you have mistaken, Di, all the way through; but I can't argue with you—you are far too clever. I am sorry you did not act differently with regard to Sir Francis. He certainly prepared Holm Hollow in a way worthy even your reception."

"Yes; and I told him another time to get the lady's consent first and choose the furniture after, as it would save trouble and possibly disagreements. No, dear, I shall not go down to-night, I am too indolent: and listen, Eve—there is no use in your lecturing me about Sir Francis. I told you I meant to have my revenge, and I have had it."

"And do you feel any the happier, the better, the nobler, Diana?" Lady Evelyn cried. "Are you not this very moment eating your heart out with remorse and self-reproach? For, in spite of all your boasted stoicism, you feel, and feel keenly. Do you not know in your heart that you have fully avenged your wrongs—that he has amply atoned for his share of them, for which, after all, I believe he was in no way to blame? I feel there is a mystery unexplained—there is a lost clue somewhere which you have never really got hold of. Even supposing all you imagine were perfectly true, you should be satisfied."

For answer, Diana stood up and paced the room hastily for a few minutes, as if trying to master a rising passion; then she sat down again with a deep sigh. "All you say may be true, Eve. I may be unmerciful, unreasonable. I may be punishing myself as much or more than I am punishing him: but I cannot forgive—I cannot forget the past."

"You never will, dear, till you bury it in a happy future."

"If you only knew, Eve," she continued, unmindful of the interruption, "how much I suffered—the long, weary days of doubts and fears and hopes deferred—the wakeful, tearful nights—the silence and solitude that were worst of all to bear, for I had nothing to console or sustain me then; no knowledge even of myself—only a blind faith and a hungry heart! Oh, Eve, did ever woman suffer as I have done?"

"Yes, dear, I am afraid so, for we are born to trouble as the sparks fly upward; but few ever rose so bravely above their sufferings as you have done. When I think

of when I first knew you, Diana, and look at you now, I am lost in wonder and admiration. Your life has been a triumph over circumstances that would have crushed many women. You have been so brave, so patient, so true. It is only this wild thirst for revenge that surprises me; it is so entirely out of keeping with the rest of your character. If you could only be more humble, Di, and see that—

“We're all of us human, and all of us erring,  
And mercy within us should ever be stirring.”

Darling, to forgive is divine !”

“There's no divinity about me, Evelyn, except that of the Pagan whose name I took when I left my own life and individuality behind me for ever. Besides, dear, it is too late now; the opportunity for explanation and forgiveness has gone by for ever.

“No, no, only leave it to me, Di; give me permission and I'll soon set matters right !”

“No—impossible—I could not. I hold you to your promise strictly; and now go down to your guests, dear, and leave me to myself.”

“Now I wonder if you will be satisfied, Diana?” Lady Evelyn said, entering Madame Mariotto's sitting-room, one morning about a week after the above conversation. “Now, indeed, I think you have had your revenge !”

“What is the matter, Evelyn?” Diana asked, looking up from her writing; “anything very wonderful?”

“That entirely depends on how you look at it, dear. Sir Francis is engaged to be married !”

“Engaged to be married! Absurd!” Di said, looking somewhat taken aback for a moment, but quickly recovering herself. “Absurd, Evelyn !”

“Yes, quite utterly absurd—but true nevertheless. He proposed to Katie Garnet, and of course she accepted him. The wedding is to take place immediately.”

“Impossible, Evelyn,” Diana repeated incredulously, “Sir Francis marry Katie Garnet! Why, she's a mere child !”

“Quite true, but Sir Francis has done equally foolish things in his life. Oh, my dear, you might have prevented this had you chosen !” Lady Evelyn said sadly. “Now think of all the misery it will cause !”

“I do not see that it need of necessity cause any,” Diana replied, after a long silence. “I do not see that it matters to me whether Sir Francis Holm marries or does

not. As I refused him myself, I really have no objection to his marrying some one else,” and she deliberately wiped her pen and put it carefully away.

“Dear, what do you mean? You cannot be serious !”

“I never was more serious in my whole life, Eve. I assure you I have no objection to Sir Francis's marriage.”

“But I have, Diana, and it must be prevented at all costs. Why, I really think you must be taking leave of your senses to speak as you do,” Lady Evelyn exclaimed. “You really must take some steps, do something, to prevent this mad marriage, for I can call it nothing else !”

“I shall not interfere—it is no business of mine; but I shall leave Beechwood tomorrow. Fortunate, is it not, that I have just finished my story ?”

“I do not see how your going away will mend matters in the least. You will, I suppose, allow things to go on to the last moment, and then make a scene at the church door. Di, Di, will nothing less content you than public ruin and exposure ?”

“I have not the faintest desire for ruin or exposure, public or otherwise; and a scene is the one thing of all others I detest. When I say I am going, I mean going for good, never to cross Sir Francis's path again, and that is the end of it !”

“How can that be the end of it, Di? With your clear, practical common sense, you must see that it is only the beginning of it. Madeline is just as worried about it as I am. She knows it is an utterly unsuitable marriage, and that Sir Francis does not really love her sister; but what can she do? The girl is flattered and infatuated, naturally, and cannot see that Sir Francis has proposed to her in a moment of pique while smarting under a disappointment. Di, it is not too late yet; you can save her, and him, and yourself, if you will. Think of it, dear, for all our sakes.”

“Very well, I will think of it,” and then she took up a hat and sunshade, and her sketch-book, and left the house, looking thoughtful and somewhat sad.

It was quite true that Sir Francis had proposed to Katie Garnet, in a moment of weakness. She had gone down to the Hollow on a message for Madeline, and found Sir Francis sitting alone in the library, looking very solitary and dejected. He said his head ached, and she soaked her handkerchief in cold water and tied it round his head, and was very tender and sympathetic.

“You are too much alone, and moped to death in this big house, Frank; you want

some one to take care of you," she said thoughtlessly.

"Yes, dear, that is quite true," he replied. "How would you like to come and take care of me, Katie? Would you like to be mistress of Holm Hollow, and my wife?"

"Oh, Frank!" she stammered, bewildered at the glorious prospect, "would you really care to marry me?"

"I think you would make me a very loving little wife, and I would try to make you a good husband." Then she hid her face on his shoulder and declared she was the happiest girl in the wide world, and ran all the way home to tell Madeline the joyful news that Frank loved her, and had asked her to be his wife.

Both Ernest and Madge were truly sorry, for they clearly saw that an unformed school-girl like Katie would be no fit mistress for Holm Hollow; but Sir Francis held to his word, and declared the child would grow older and wiser in time. It seemed as if he did not want to discuss the subject, or hear any more about it. As soon as Katie was ready he was, and that was all he had to say. But when he reflected a little he began to realise what a rash, foolish thing he had done. Still, he had not the energy to undo it, and so matters took their course.

Only Lady Evelyn begged Madeline to do all in her power to break off the engagement. "There are reasons, dear, strong reasons, against it; but unfortunately I am not at liberty to disclose them," she said; "and the worst of it is, Sir Francis does not know them himself. It is the most unfortunate and complicated business in the world! Give me a day or two, Madeline, and keep the matter quiet if you can, and I will do my best to set things straight."

"I have tried to persuade Katie to give Frank up, but the silly child will not consent. Do you know, Evelyn, I fancy he cared about Madame Mariotto."

"So he does. He proposed to her the other day, and she refused him. It is a very unfortunate business altogether; much as I should like to, I cannot explain it."

Mrs. Holm returned to the Vicarage more perplexed and troubled than ever. She had often fancied that there was some event in Sir Francis's life of which he had never spoken, some secret chamber that he always kept locked. Now she began to wonder whether it could have had anything to do with Madame Mariotto. In any case and under any circumstances Katie was not the sort of wife for him. Madeline had his true happiness, and that of her sister, too much at heart ever to see them united.

The mistress of Holm Hollow would have a high and honoured position to fulfil, and should be in every way worthy of it. Katie was a dear, good little girl, warm-hearted and impulsive, but without an atom of dignity, or the capacity for acquiring it, in her composition. More than ever Madeline felt so when on returning from Beechwood she saw Sir Francis and Katie walking up and down the Vicarage garden. She paused a moment to watch them, Sir Francis bending down gently and patiently to listen, she clinging to his arm and whispering something which made her own face very rosy, though it did not seem to impress him very forcibly. Every now and then an expression of pain would cross his face, and a look come into his eyes as if his thoughts were far away. Nevertheless, he was supremely patient with all Katie's little absurdities, and they were many.

"It cannot, must not go on," Madeline said to herself. "I will not have Frank sacrifice himself to a mistaken sense of duty. I shall take Katie home to-morrow, and tell papa the whole story from beginning to end, and make him write and cancel the engagement." Ernest warmly applauded her resolve, and after having come to it Madge felt much happier.

Though willing enough to spend an hour or two with Katie, Sir Francis seemed rather to avoid being with Ernest and Madeline; and as soon as the latter joined them he said good-bye, declining to remain for luncheon, and sauntered home through the meadows, striking the ground of the Hollow by the river, as he had done that sunny Sunday afternoon two months before. He knew Madeline had just come from Beechwood, and he possibly dreaded hearing anything of either Lady Evelyn or Madame. He knew his engagement would seem weak in the eyes of both, and he did not want to hear either their commiseration or congratulation. On entering the Park he turned aside from the path and dived into the very deepest and thickest part of the woods. The trees overhead interlaced their branches and made cool, pleasant shadows; the velvety moss underfoot was soft and moist, and restful to the eyes after the glare of sunshine; the river made soft music in the far distance; and the immediate air was full of that living noonday stillness which makes us wonder and feel glad.

Sir Francis walked on, scarcely heeding which way he went, and suddenly through the trees he caught the glimmer of a white dress. His heart beat fiercely as he drew near; he seemed to feel instinctively who was there. Sitting on a low, mossy stump

of a tree, with her hat on the grass beside her, and her drawing materials scattered at her feet, was Madame Mariotto. Her hands were loosely clasped, and her eyes were fixed on some object far away, with a wistful, weary expression. The soft moss gave no echo of a footstep, and not till Sir Francis stood just beside her did she perceive him. A sudden wave of colour passed over her face, and involuntarily she pressed her hand to her heart as if to still its almost audible beating.

"Pardon me, Madame, I fear I have startled you?" he said, raising his hat.

"I was dreaming, I think," she replied, holding out her hand with a faint smile, which encouraged him to pause, for he had meant to pass on, "and I believe I am trespassing," she continued. "I rambled in here somehow, and the place was so deliciously still and cool, so suggestive of fairyland, that I thought I would try to sketch it."

"I hope your dreams were pleasant, Madame, and I also hope you will trespass often, and be the queen of fairy-land."

"I? Oh, no; this will be my last visit, for I am going away to-morrow; and besides, you have found another queen. Permit me to congratulate you, Sir Francis. I hope you may be very happy."

"Happy, Madame!" he exclaimed, sitting down on a tree-root near her, and speaking in cold, even tones. "I don't think you hope or expect that any more than I do!"

"Then why marry?" she said, looking at him earnestly, and asking the question in spite of herself.

"Why indeed! Partly, I suppose, because I have a greater faculty for making a fool of myself than most people; partly because I am lonely, solitary, hungering and thirsting for affection and companionship of some sort. But pardon me, I forgot that my affairs possess no interest for you!"

"Yes, they do, a little. Sir Francis, your life has a history. I should like to know it," she said, more gently than she had ever spoken to him before.

"Yes, my life has a history, and it is a sad one," he replied, after a few moments' consideration.

"Not being unacquainted with misfortune myself, I can pity the wretched," she said, softly. "I thought from the first that you were not happy!"

"She is sorry for me, and that is why she is so kind! I have wronged her," Sir Francis thought, as he drew a little nearer. He could not resist the pleasure of being with her and talking confidently to her.

"My life has not been a very happy one, as you conjectured, but I have no doubt it was to a great extent my own fault. Still, few men at thirty repeat the follies of twenty, few men rush blindly a second time into the same blunder; but I have done so. It must be a fatality!"

"Pardon me, Sir Francis, I don't quite comprehend."

"Listen, Madame, ten years ago I fell in love with a girl not in my own sphere of life, though I was not then master of Holm Hollow; but she was very beautiful, and sweet, and gentle, though ignorant and uneducated. Still, I loved her and I married her. For a few brief weeks we were supremely happy, living in a little cottage by the seaside, dreaming the long delicious summer days away. My wife, though utterly illiterate, was never weary of hearing me read to her, and she showed great taste for learning. Of the ways of the world she was ignorant, unacquainted even with the ordinary rules and usages of good society; and before I could introduce her to the world I felt I must give her some training. She was young, eager, longing to see what the great world was like, and I think fretted a little at the seclusion we lived in; so in order that she might have the benefit of the example and precept of a refined and cultivated woman, I wrote to my cousin Florence, confided my secret to her, and asked her advice and assistance. She came at once, and her verdict of my wife was very unsatisfactory. 'She is very lovely,' she said, 'but totally ignorant. You must place her in a good school or family for a year or two before you can attempt to introduce her to the world. She would be only a disgrace to you, and a perpetual misery to herself, in her present state. She is young enough to go to school for two years, and old enough to profit by it.' Florence was a woman of the world, with plenty of common-sense, and I saw the force of every word she said, but Miriam did not. She clung to me and begged me not to send her away, promised to learn anything from me, and finally became sulky and obstinate, two qualities I fancied had no place in her sweet, loving nature. However, Florence was resolute, and made arrangements for placing her in a private family in Rouen, who took a few pupils. Her own sister had been finished there, and she knew the place was in every way suitable. So Miriam was sent there, Florence herself accompanying her and making all the arrangements. She was introduced as Miss Holm; but of that I knew nothing till it was too late to undo it.

Now I think I was foolish, wrong even, to send her away; for though her mind was a blank, I think I could have written almost anything there; but I was very young, and had not the tact, patience, or knowledge requisite. I felt fearfully dull after Miriam's departure, despite my cousin's efforts to cheer me; and just then I was offered a diplomatic post at St. Petersburg, and accepted it. That, at least, would enable me to pass the time. I did not correspond with my wife except through Florence; and for that also I blamed myself bitterly; but it was Kismet! At the end of two years I returned to England and heard that Miriam had betrayed me. She had eloped from Rouen with the riding-master who gave her lessons, and died a few weeks after of scarlet fever. I was stunned, shocked, bewildered; and but for Florence, I think I should have gone mad. A long illness followed, and when I was able to travel I sought out Miriam's grave in Paris, and erected a tablet to her memory. Then I became a fugitive and a wanderer on the face of the earth!"

"And Florence?" Madame Mariotto said breathlessly. "Did she not continue to console you? Did you not love her and ask her to be your wife?"

"Love her! No. Poor Florence!" and a shadow of pain swept over his face. "She is dead, Madame. Let her rest. For eight years I wandered over the world, meeting and admiring many women, loving none till I saw you; but I need not dwell on that—enough that in a moment of weakness I made another fatal mistake, I asked a girl to be my wife with whom I have not a sentiment or idea in common, whose earthly ambition is bounded by bonnets and balls, tea and tennis. Such has been my life; and no human being has ever heard so much of it; but, like the Ancient Mariner, I felt to-day that I must tell my story to some one!"

"It is very sad," she said, in a strange voice, shading her face with her hand; "but, Sir Francis, did you really marry your first love? Was it not a sham, a delusion, a trick played on an ignorant country girl?"

"I most assuredly married my wife legally. What have I ever done, Madame, that you should think so badly of me?" he said haughtily.

"Suppose, Sir Francis, that your wife were alive—that she did not die, as you imagined?"

"I wish to Heaven she were, that I might ask her forgiveness, and tell her that I have long since forgiven her."

"But, Sir Francis, suppose you had

nothing to forgive? Suppose the story of elopement with a groom were false—merely trumped up to deceive you, and a tale of your faithlessness and a sham marriage trumped up to deceive her? Did you ever see a certificate of your wife's death?"

"No; but Florence was with her at the last. She showed me her grave," Sir Francis replied, looking very much puzzled. "Madame, you have aroused some very strange sensations, awakened very painful doubts—and hopes. Can you give me any clue to the mystery? Can you—did you know my wife? Is she alive?"

"Yes, Sir Francis, she is alive. I never met her; but I know she is living. At the time she left Rouen she was fully persuaded that you had deceived her; later she learned that the marriage was legal in all respects except that you were both under age, and married without the consent of your parents, which in France makes a marriage void. Besides, she believed, or was given to understand, that you loved your cousin Florence Dacre, and wished to make her your wife."

"Treachery! treachery!" Sir Francis cried. "I never loved Florence, never loved any one but Miriam. Oh, if she had only trusted me!"

"I think she must have had strong reasons for doubting," Madame said gently. "Do not blame her till you know all."

"One word more, Madame—can you tell me where to look for my wife?" Sir Francis said, rising. "I have no heart, alas! to give her, but home, and name, and care, and her rightful place in society I can bestow. I thank you, Madame, for what you have told me. I can hardly realise it yet, but I thank you. I shall tell Miss Garnet the whole painful truth, and then set about finding Miriam. Good-bye, Madame Mariotto. Will you give me your hand this once?"

For a moment she hesitated, and then gave it him; he raised it reverently to his lips, and still holding it, asked her pardon for the words he had spoken a few days before. "I thought I was free to offer you myself, Madame. Forgive me. My love is yours, and I cannot recall it; but my duty belongs to another."

"We are both shackled, Sir Francis," she said, with an attempt at a smile; and then snatching away her hand, she said good-bye carelessly. Sir Francis bowed with his usual courtesy and left her, walking through the woods towards the Hollow like a man of "sense forlorn." Diana Mariotto watched him till he was out of sight, and then rose to her feet with a glad smile, and hastened home to Beech-

wood, scarcely able to comprehend the meaning of all Sir Francis had said to her. He was true after all, and she had believed him false—loyal, and she had condemned him as a traitor! He could not recall the love he had given her, but he was anxious and willing to make all possible reparation to his long-lost wife, the woman he believed for years to have foully wronged him—the woman who, in spite of all things, still retained a place in his heart.

Very different were Sir Francis's feelings as he wandered aimlessly through the woods, scarcely heeding whither he went, thinking of the dead and buried past, now so suddenly awakened. He was a very proud man, and the disgrace and misery of his early and unfortunate marriage had been almost more than he was able to bear. Now to have it recalled, the old wounds reopened, and by the woman he loved, was a terrible shock; and the more he thought it over the more perplexed and troubled he felt. With throbbing head and aching heart he threw himself under a tree, and tried to think the matter out to the end, and imagine what the result would be. First of all, he would have to tell Ernest and Madeline everything (for in no other way would he be able to explain the abrupt breaking off of his engagement with Katie Garnet); and that in itself was a sore humiliation to a man of his temperament. Then another thing that troubled him still more was the possible circumstances under which he might find his wife, and in how far she might meet his wishes. What had the years that passed done for her? With him, looking back, they had passed lightly and pleasantly enough. Since his grandfather's death not a single real trouble had befallen him till the day he met and loved Madame Mariotto; but for the woman who bore his name, who had been so cruelly separated from him in her very youth, and thrown upon the world to fight the battle of life by herself, what had she done? How had she supported herself, what had been her history since she left Ptuen, and where should he begin to find her? For eight years she had been parted from him. She was young, beautiful, ignorant, inexperienced, poor, and friendless; for her father and mother had been but poor, plain country folks, who thought their only child's marriage with the handsome young student a great step in life for her, and who would never think of seeking her out and helping her; and from what Sir Francis remembered of his wife's character he thought she would never return to them

alone and forsaken—heart-broken, too, for she had loved him—of that he felt perfectly convinced.

But what had become of her? What had been her fate, and above all, how did Madame Mariotto come to hear of her existence and learn her story? The question was perplexing, irritating, maddening almost, for the only reasonable solution seemed to be that either in the way of business or through the kindly offices of charity Madame had become acquainted with his wife's unhappy history, for she distinctly said she had never met her, nor was it to be supposed that she was likely to mix in the same sphere as Madame, despite the fact of her being Lady Holm, for was she not a deserted wife, utterly unprovided for?

On the other hand, if she had been poor and in want, why had she not applied to him? She must have known he was rich and his own master, and that even had she sinned against him, he would still provide her with the necessities and comforts of life. But being innocentas Madame said she was, being wronged and slandered, why had not she come to him for protection and appealed to him to right her wrongs? That was the question which puzzled him most of all; and the only reasonable answer to it was because she believed him guilty, believed that he had cruelly wronged and deliberately deserted her; and with a pride equal to his own, she had held aloof, and refused to be indebted to him for anything. For that he admired and respected her, but he trembled as he thought of what her life had been, and asked himself whether she would be willing to return to him, and whether she was fit to be mistress of Holm Hollow.

"If she is not, I alone am to blame. In whatever condition or circumstances I find her it must make no difference to me. I took her, child as she was, and promised to love, honour, and cherish her, and yet I allowed another to usurp my place. I trusted her to strangers, and they betrayed her and me; therefore, whatever has come of it, the fault is mine. I alone am responsible. She is my legal wife, and I shall give her her rightful place in the world; if she disgraces it and me, mine alone be the blame, on my shoulders fall the punishment. But the question is, Where am I to find her? how am I to set about seeking her? The only person who can help me is Madame Mariotto. I must see her again. I must entreat of her to help me to discover poor Miriam. Perhaps she may be kind to her; perhaps, who knows, but we may, through my long-lost

wife, become still better friends. I will dine at Beechwood to-night, and ask her to tell me where she last saw Miriam ; and now I must go home and have a rest, or I shall not be able to go out at all, for I feel as if I were going to be ill ; the events of the last few days have been too much for me." And as he slowly returned to the Hollow, still lost in thought, Sir Francis looked older and more worn than he had ever appeared before, and he seemed almost to stagger as he climbed slowly up the terrace, thinking as much of seeing Madame Mariotto once more as of the strange tidings she had that day brought him.

## CHAPTER VI.

" Oh, that 'twere possible,  
After long grief and pain,  
To find the arms of my true love  
Round me once again."

" *E*VELYN, you were right and I was wrong with regard to Sir Francis," Diana Mariotto said that evening, when she and her hostess were alone for a few minutes before dinner. " I met him to-day, and somehow it all come out, that is, a part of it. I gave him to understand that his wife was alive, he had been grossly deceived about her, and he is going to look for her. He promised to tell that girl he asked to marry him, so you need have no more anxiety on that score ; and if you will have me, I think I should like to remain a few days longer at Beechwood."

" Surely, dear ; the longer you stay the better I shall like it—that is until you have to go home," said Lady Evelyn. " But, Di, how did you manage to tell Sir Francis so much without telling him all ? Did he suspect nothing ? "

" No ; he seemed too dazed and bewildered even to think ; he looked ill, too, and worn. I really felt almost sorry for him. His is a generous, magnanimous nature. Eve, he would not say one hard word of Florence Dacre, though she ruined the happiness of his life."

" No ; and he would not say a hard word of you either, though you have continued what Florence commenced. I told you all along, Di, that I was sure of. Sir Francis was more sinned against than sinning," Lady Evelyn cried. " Oh, my dearest, it will, it must all come right now."

Diana smiled slightly, and then they went downstairs together. There was a large dinner-party, to which Sir Francis

had been invited, and Madame Mariotto glanced round the drawing-room to see if he had arrived. As he was not there she walked to one of the windows and stood looking out, perhaps to watch the arrival of half-a-dozen grey-coated warriors returning from the slaughter of the grouse.

Never had she looked so beautiful, Lady Evelyn thought, as on that evening. She was simply dressed, a creamy white muslin robe with some tea roses at the neck and in her hair ; but there was a new, strange light in her glorious eyes, and a wonderful radiant softness in her face. She was kinder, too, and gentler to every one ; and Lord Lucerne took heart of grace once more (for Jack had persuaded him to remain, and the news of Sir Francis's engagement to Katie Garnet had revived him wonderfully) ; and after dinner he begged of her to sing, and for a wonder she consented. Sir Francis had arrived late with Ernest ; and he watched Lucerne enviously as he led Madame to the piano and began turning over some music. But she always preferred to sing from memory, and began at once without even pausing to consider—

" Love laid his sleepless head  
On a thorny rosy bed ;  
And his eyes with tears were red,  
And pale his lips as the dead.

" And fear and sorrow and scorn  
Kept watch by his lips forlorn,  
Till the night was overworn  
And the world was merry with morn.

" And joy came up with the day  
And kissed Love's lips as he lay,  
And the watchers ghostly and grey  
Sped from his pillow away.

" And his eyes as the dawn grew bright,  
And his lips waxed ruddy as light,  
Sorrow may reign for a night,  
But day will bring back delight."

Sir Francis listened with closed eyes and throbbing heart. Was the song meant for him as a prophecy of joy to come ? He would take it as an omen of that ; and with the last notes ringing in his ears, he took his departure, excusing himself to Lady Evelyn on the plea of a bad headache. He felt unable to speak to Madame that night. He would defer it till the morrow.

Next day one of the servants from the Hollow rode over to Beechwood with a note for Lady Evelyn. It was from the Vicar, saying that Sir Francis was very ill. Madeline had gone with Katie to Bath, and Mr. Holm wanted to know if Lady Evelyn could send him a trustworthy nurse, as all the Vicarage servants were too young and

inexperienced to be of much use, and the housekeeper at the Hollow was laid up with rheumatism.

"Tell Mr. Holm one of us will be over directly," Madame Mariotto said when she heard the contents of the note; then when the servant had left the room she turned to Evelyn, "Order the carriage for me, dear, I am going to nurse him!"

"You!" Lady Evelyn cried, "Why, what has come over you, Diana! You are not strong enough; and, besides, you know nothing whatever of nursing. Let me send Minchin, she is a sensible, reliable woman. You are not fit for such work, Di!"

"Oh, yes, I am. I must go, Eve, for I believe I am in a great measure responsible for his illness."

"So do I," Lady Evelyn said promptly, "You really have behaved shamefully to the poor fellow!"

"Well, I will make up for it. I have been too hard, perhaps; and though I have had my revenge, it was not nearly so sweet as I fancied. He did look fearfully ill last evening; but it is more mental than physical, and I possess the elixir to set him right. Mason," to her maid, who, at that moment entered the room, "pack me up some things, morning wrappers and plain gowns, and come with me over to Holm Hollow—Sir Francis Holm is ill and I am going to nurse him!"

If Madame had said "Pack me a valise, I am going to the North Pole or the Fiji Islands," Mason would have expressed no surprise, so she proceeded to do as she was commanded, and an hour after Diana was at the Hollow, explaining her intentions to Ernest.

"It is really good of you," he said kindly; "but I am afraid, Madame, you do not realise what you have undertaken—the task, I am certain, will be beyond your strength. Frank, poor fellow, is dangerously ill, and will require the most careful watching. I have telegraphed to town for Dr. Granby, and asked him to send a trained nurse from one of the institutes."

"I am sorry you have done that, because I have something to tell Sir Francis that I am certain will do him good. He has something on his mind that he is anxious about, and I can relieve his suspense, if you will let me see him, Mr. Holm."

"But, dear Madame, he is in a raging fever!" the Vicar replied. "He does not know any one, and talks incessantly in the wildest way. He would not understand one word you said to him."

"Oh, what shall I do?" she cried, suddenly losing all self-possession. "It is my

fault, Mr. Holm, every bit of it," and then she told him the whole story, keeping back nothing, sparing herself in no way. When she finished, Ernest looked very grave.

"You have certainly been rather hard on poor Frank," he said; "but from your point of view you had reason. No wonder, though, the poor fellow has broken down under such an accumulation of trouble."

"But you will let me go to him now?" she pleaded. "You will let me nurse him?" and Ernest felt that he had no right to prevent her. Earnestly he longed for Madeline's return; she would know much better how to act in such an emergency.

When the great London physician arrived he said that Sir Francis was suffering from brain-fever, and looked rather grave; but at that stage of the malady he could say nothing—it would be days before the crisis would be reached, but good nursing, good constitution, &c., would do wonders.

Madame was constantly in the sick-room, and Sir Francis's incessant ravings were a terrible reproach to her. His thoughts had gone back to the past, and he often thought he was in the little cottage by the seaside, where he had lived with his young wife; then her own name was mixed up with Miriam's and Florence's; he was asking her forgiveness for some offence.

Day after day dragged wearily by, and Lady Evelyn and Madeline fancied Diana would be ill herself, for she never left Sir Francis's side. His ravings had ceased, but he lay in a state of utter unconsciousness, moaning feebly at intervals; and the doctors shook their heads and declared he was sinking fast and nothing could be done. Only Madame refused to give up hope, refused to leave him, and at last one morning, in that sad hour before the dawn "when sick men die," he opened his eyes slowly and saw her bending over him, and knew her. Feebly he tried to whisper her name; but she laid a finger gently on his lip.

Dear, you must not speak, you have been very ill, and must be careful."

"Diana!" he said faintly, "or her spirit?"

"No, darling, neither; but Miriam Holm, your wife," she whispered, her tears dropping slowly on his thin hands; and as his poor weak brain took in the sense of her words slowly, a great restfulness crept into his face.

"My wife!" he murmured. "I see it all now," and then, with a deep-sigh, he fell asleep and was saved.

Very slowly he recovered strength, for he had been very near the confines of the "undiscovered country." Like a little child he had to be nursed back to strength. Sometimes it seemed as if he was quite content to lie still and be waited on tenderly by Miriam, Madame Mariotto no longer.

The general impression was that Sir Francis had been married to Madame when he thought he was going to die, and that his cousin had performed the ceremony; and the Vicar and Madeline agreed that it was as well to let the impression remain. The servants all called Miriam "my lady," and looked to her for orders; and when Sir Francis grew strong enough to talk over the matter he agreed that there was no need to enter into explanations and disclose the details of his early marriage.

"However, Ernest, if you like, if it will be more satisfactory to your conscience, I will get a licence and marry Miriam over again. You shall perform the ceremony here," he said; and Lady Evelyn and Jack Westwater, whom they consulted, thought that perhaps it would be as well, and save possible complications in the future, as there might be some little difficulty in procuring evidence of the first marriage.

As soon as Sir Francis was able to travel they went abroad, promising if he was better to be back to the Hollow for Christmas: but they found their villa on the shores of the Gulf of Genoa so pleasant, and were so supremely happy in each other's society, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot," that they resolved to postpone their return till the spring. It seemed a pity to exchange the genial warmth and beauty that surrounded them for the bleak, barren gloom of an English winter.

But in "the greenest growth of the May-time," when the woods were full of leaf, and bloom, and perfume, and the birds singing joyously, Sir Francis and Lady Holm returned to the Hollow. It was no quiet return this time, but a triumphal entry.

All the way from the railway station the road was lined with villagers; it seemed as if all Cloverfield had turned out to greet Sir Francis and his bride, and as they smiled and nodded from their open

carriage, no one could help noticing what a handsome pair they were. Those who knew them personally were amazed at the improvement in both. Sir Francis had never looked so young and happy in his life, and Miriam was, if possible, far more beautiful than ever. The one charm she had lacked, the restful peace of happy love, now shone in her eyes and illumined all her features.

At the Hollow, Jack Westwater, Lord Lucerne, and Ernest were standing on the terrace waiting to greet them, and Madeline and Lady Evelyn were just inside the door, tears and smiles chasing each other on their faces, as they each in turn clasped Lady Holm in a fond embrace.

"Welcome, dearest Miriam, welcome!" Lady Evelyn cried. "Welcome home at last; I told you it would all come out right in the end, and you see I was a true prophetess!"

"Yes, dearest Eve, you were right and I was wrong; but Frank has forgiven me, and you must do so too," and that was the only allusion ever made to the past.

But Lady Holm and Lady Evelyn are still dear, close friends, and Miriam never forgets that it was through Lady Evelyn's kindness and wisdom she was persuaded to forget her wild, wicked desire for revenge, and learn how much more sweet and blessed it is to forgive.

Sir Francis and his wife are both perfectly and supremely happy; and though they sometimes mourn the years that divided them, and the cruel circumstances that sent them apart, both feel that they have not lived in vain.

"If I had not been thrown on the world to fight my own battle, the world would never have heard of me," said Miriam one day; "and then, Frank, though you might have continued to love me, you never would have been so proud of me as you say you are, and certainly necessity alone could have compelled me to cultivate my talents as I have done. Beauty might win your heart, Frank, but I wonder if it would have kept it?"

"Something has kept it, darling," he replied, looking at her with proud admiration. And in the perfect companionship and sympathy of taste that now exists between them, he feels that the years of their separation were not lost, and what he once thought a bitter and grievous trial was indeed a blessing in disguise.

PAUL DENHAM.

# TEA-TABLE TALK.—BY AMY KEN.

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**H**ELENA has now returned home, and for the first two days has been busy with her notes, in order to satisfy everybody that she had learned something from Miss Ken's instructions. She had been for a trip on the water, and she had seen the Isle of Wight from a distance, and the very name of it, she declared, brought pleasing recollections to her mind.

"Well, tell us the recollections," said Uncle William, who had taken a cosy seat in the parlour.

"Reminiscences of refreshing sea-breezes and picnics, of pleasant rambles near Southampton, and a dream of that beautiful Isle of Wight which every one talks about, as containing both the picturesque and the sublime in a narrow limit, and the ever-varying nature of scenery. We went to the New Forest, it is true, twice, and I would not have missed the stupendous magnitude, and for the nonce the pleasure of lying underneath the wide-spreading branches of forest trees is delightful; but soon trees, nothing but trees, and partial darkness, become monotonous, and unless you had a merry party with you, I think it would conduce to melancholy; but in the Isle of Wight you can walk in the midst of wild flowers, you can go through pretty shrubberies, sure of coming out soon on the other side, you can ascend hills high enough to see the vessels passing up and down the channel, the beautiful yachts, the mighty steamers, and the full-masted vessels; then you can walk down to the sea-coast, bathe, or sit and watch the merry waves; for a friend we met at Southampton declared everything appeared merry in the Isle of Wight, Nature seemed to smile on all, and peace and happiness to reign around. Some pretty lines this lady taught me, which commence thus:—

‘The Garden Isle,  
Where Nature has her charms, combined  
With grove, and stream, and valley joined;  
Where glen, and rock, and mountain high  
Are blent in strangest harmony.’"

"You speak with enthusiasm of a place you have only viewed from a distance, and have nothing to tell us about what you really did see. For instance, you did not seem very enthusiastic about Netley Abbey," observed Uncle William.

"I did not care much about the ruins, but I am glad I saw them; Aunt Ken has taken some sketches of the scenery around,

which is lovely. But you remind me of Judith, who, when we were sitting down near the ruins, said in her sarcastic way: 'Well, Aunt Ken, we have seen Netley Abbey, and I feel like the Englishman who saw the Falls of Niagara from a distance, and then packed up his portmanteau and returned home, saying, "I have seen Niagara;" and this is the Netley Abbey that Horace Walpole and the poet Gray have pictured so gloriously!'

"'You are too bad,' was the reply. 'It is not the ruins that they so much lauded as the beautiful landscape. You now see before you Nature in her brightest and best clothing, and the ruins lie here, in contrast to the efforts of every plant, shrub, and tree, to exhibit their beauties to your view. A sketch of these ruins would not please the eye of our home friends, but if we could sketch the hill and dale, wood and water we see around us, what a delightful picture it would make! It reminds me of some obscure poet who in my younger days wrote some lines suggestive of rural scenes and peaceful nature, and I remember he commences by envying the birds, and says:—

‘I would that I were that green linnet,  
And I had my apple-tree too;  
I'd sit all the sunny day in it,  
With nothing but singing to do.’"

He has to return to hard labour, and he engages some one to procure him a bird similar to that he heard singing in the tree, and concludes by referring to the fact that he took the bird to his home and petted him as the reminder of beautiful scenery; and he concludes thus:—

‘He sings the same song, but it pleases not now:  
I did not bring home the river and sky:  
He sang to my ear—they sang to my eye.’"

And if you are a real lover of Nature, as I am, you will ever remember this beautiful landscape, and perhaps forget the ruins.' I am sure I shall remember the beautiful rural scene, and perhaps quite forget the ruins, as aunt suggested," added Helena.

"Yet," replied Uncle William, "people go hundreds of miles to see these relics, not so much to discover beauty of architecture, or even designs that may be adapted for modern purposes, but to really verify history. Old books, written more than three centuries ago, tell you how the monks existed here, and they tell of the refectory,

the dormitories, the chapels, &c. Well, you go and see them, and you are sure that what has been written is true. Thus in various parts of the world there is much to verify the truths of the Bible, though sceptics like to sneer at these truths ; but there they are revealed to the view of any one who chooses to search for information."

"Why, uncle, you are getting as good a moraliser as Aunt Ken," observed Helena.

"No, only in her absence I thought I would take up the cudgels ; but if I had all of you here I should very soon have to drop them," was the reply. "But," he continued, "you had unmistakable evidence of William Rufus's death by the surroundings you saw. Tell me a little more about that."

"Well, you know," said Helena, "the old stone is encased in iron, and looks more like a monument. I had to take down for aunt's satisfaction the inscriptions, a copy of which I have with me, and I will read it to you, if you please."

Uncle William gladly accepted this new evidence. Helena read as follows :

"On the first side—'Here stood the oak tree on which an arrow, shot by Sir Walter Tyrel at a stag, glanced and struck King William II. (surnamed Rufus) in the breast, of which he instantly died on the 28th day of August, anno 1100.' This spot was visited by King George and Queen Charlotte, June 27th, 1789."

"Second side—'King William II. being slain as before related, was laid in a cart belonging to one Purkess, and drawn from hence to Winchester, and buried in the Cathedral Church of that city.'

"Third side—'That where an event so memorable had happened might not be hereafter unknown, this stone was set up by Lord Delaware, who had seen the tree growing in this place, anno 1745. This stone was repaired by John Richard, Earl of Delaware, anno 1789.'

"Fourth side—'This stone having been much mutilated, and the inscriptions on the three sides defaced, the more durable memorial, with the original inscription, was erected in the year 1841 by William Sturges Bourne, warden.'

"This I consider very important evidence of the truth of history, and I shall ask you to give me a copy of it," replied Uncle William.

"Well, I think I am acting a very important part this evening, I am actually giving instruction ; but I am doing my best to represent Aunt Ken for this week, and I am anxious for the post that will convey to me all the pleasures my cousins are having in the Isle of Wight. When they return we

shall go over and over again the same ground, and thus our visit will always give us food for conversation."

"Did you see any fine ships in Southampton Harbour, or any foreign yachts?" asked Uncle William.

"Oh, yes," responded Helena, "any quantity ; but this reminds me of a question asked Aunt Ken on your account when the weather kept us prisoners. You know young girls have not very reflective minds, and you know what it is looking through the windows on a wet day anxious to catch something to divert your attention, and suddenly Annie cried out, 'Look, aunt, at those funny boats passing swiftly over the sea. What are they?'

"They belong to the Trinity House, and are doubtless pressing upon some vessel for the dues.'

"Yes, that reminds me," said Annie, "that Uncle William told us to ask you why that great nautical institution near the Tower got to be named the 'Trinity House.'

"That he ought to have known better than me ; but I may say that our Saxon ancestors appear to have had faith in the power of demons to raise a tempest, and equal faith that the name of the Holy Trinity, with prayer, would allay it ; therefore the blessings of the priests were given on the boats, and when the sailors required their services they went to what they termed the Trinity House for them. Beda tells us : 'Germanus, the bishop, sailed into Britain with Lupus, and first quelled the tempest of the sea, and afterwards that of the Pelagians, A.D. 429. The demons who had possession of England at that time did what princes of the power of the air might very naturally be expected to do — raised storms and darkened the sky with clouds. The sails could not bear the fury of the winds, the sailor's skill was forced to give way, and the ship, overpowered by the waves, was ready to sink. The bishop, with the name of the TRINITY and some drops of water, stilled the tempest, and he and his companions proceeded on their voyage, and soon enjoyed the quiet of the wished-for shore.' Now Beda gives us this in his "Ecclesiastical History," and though written in Latin, it explains the fact that the early English were very superstitious."

"I am really very much obliged for this information," replied Uncle William, "for I have very often been puzzled at the origin of the term. I always knew they were very exclusive as a body, and I wondered whether Trinity in this sense meant a trio who kept matters to themselves as closely as the affairs of the British Cabinet."

## FAMOUS MEN AND WOMEN.

### PRINCESS WILLIAM OF PRUSSIA.

**W**HEN the newspapers announced in May, 1882, that a great-grandchild of the Queen of England was born, it was generally believed this was the first of a third generation proceeding from Her Majesty. Such, however, was not the case, for the eldest daughter of the Crown Princess of Germany, better known to us as the Princess Royal, was married in February, 1878, to Prince Bernard, Hereditary Prince of Saxe-Meiningen, and in 1879 she had a daughter who was afterwards christened Feodora Victoria, and became the first of Queen Victoria's great-grandchildren. The Queen's eldest grandson, Prince Frederick William Victor Albert, the eldest son of the Crown Prince of Germany, married in February, 1881, Augusta Victoria Amelia Louise Maria Constance, eldest daughter of the Grand Duke of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Augustenburg; and a very grand wedding it was, too; and since her marriage this royal lady has ever maintained that popularity which the nation entertained on her first introduction into Prussia.

Since the triumphal entry of the German troops after the victories of their last great campaign in 1871, Berlin never presented such a sight as it did on this wedding-day; and surely the bringing home of a Royal Prussian bride was quite as important an event as the victorious return of a Prussian army. The inhabitants of the capital resolved to celebrate the event with becoming splendour. When the quiet citizens woke on the wedding morning they found their streets transformed as if by magic into bowers of evergreens and fluttering flags. All down the line of route, from the Belle Vue Mansion on the bank of the Spree, which was set apart for the Princess's accommodation, to the old Schloss, or Castle, where Her Highness was publicly received in State by the Imperial Court, there was such an array of bunting, coats of arms, flowers, and artistic devices as had perhaps never been witnessed before.

At the time of the marriage the Royal bridegroom was just twenty-one, and his bride three months his junior. Great care had been taken with the education of the Princess, and it is well known that her noble father took a deep interest in the development of his children's characters and abilities. For many years an English lady possessing great accomplishments superintended the Princess's education; and it is said that her pupil eventually spoke the English language as fluently as her instructress. The Princess Augusta

Victoria is tall and elegant, and has a certain stateliness of manner which is softened by great kindness and courteousness in her address. Her Royal Highness is what may be termed a blonde, with a fair complexion, and has very expressive blue eyes. As to Prince William, he is certainly not so tall, and does not look so vigorous and robust as his princely father did at his age; but still the physical type of his paternal ancestors undoubtedly predominates in him too. Apart from the face, which resembles his father's in profile, Prince William has inherited the proverbial large hand of the Hohenzollerns, which palmistry has sought to connect with their remarkable achievements in the sphere of conquest from the days when Conrad fought his way into the favour of Kaiser Red Beard and the Wardership of Nurenberg Castle, on till the forcible annexation by his twenty-third lineal descendant of Hanover, Hesse-Cassel, Frankfort, Schleswig-Holstein, and Alsace-Lorraine. A good story is told in Germany concerning the Prince. When an infant nine months old he was presented by his father to an assemblage of Berlin citizens, one of whom facetiously took out his watch and held it close to the Royal infant's ear. The latter, however, less amused by its ticking than attracted by its jewelled brilliancy, clutched the chronometer with his tiny fist, and kept a very tight grip of it too. "Ah, see," said his princely father, smiling. "Whatever a Hohenzollern once gets into his grasp he never lets go, if he can help it."

It would be difficult to find a match anywhere for his Royal mother, the Queen of England's daughter, in respect to varied intellectual accomplishments; and the Crown Prince too, his illustrious father, is admired for his manliness, good sense, his pacific nature, his noble simplicity, his straightforwardness, and his winning *bonhomie*; but while inheriting to some extent the particular graces of both his parents, it would be perhaps nearer the mark to say that in the general tendency and constitution of his mind the young prince bears more resemblance to his Imperial grandfather than to any other of his less remote ancestors.

It may be said that English tastes prevail now in most of the German Courts, and that in every succeeding year the apparent natural love for England becomes stronger, and it is possible these domestic associations may tend to strengthen the bond of friendship between the two nations.

It would be tedious to enumerate all the grand scenes of betrothal and marriage that German celebrities pass through;

## Biographies of Famous Men and Women.

but let us take a brief glance at the concluding ceremony when Prince and Princess William of Prussia were wedded on Sunday, the 27th of February, 1881. Receiving the bridal pair at the entrance to the chapel, the Cathedral clergy conducted them to the altar, and took their stand themselves beside it until the gorgeous train had all entered and become seated. Then Dr. Kögel, the chief Court chaplain, commenced delivering a short address in a firm and earnest voice. He referred to the double wedding three years ago, to the confirmation of Prince Henry before he went to sea, and to the golden festival of the Emperor's wedded life, which had all been celebrated there. Then he referred to the earthly hopes which were centred in the bridal pair, to the interest taken in their union by the Queen of England and other European sovereigns, and to the joy and confidence with which the event was regarded in all Germany, but particularly in Schleswig-Holstein. At the close Dr. Kögel stepped forward to meet the Prince and Princess, who advanced and joined hands; in response to the usual questions Prince William answered clearly and confidently, but the Princess's voice seemed to tremble. Rings were then exchanged, and at this moment a signal was conveyed to the garden space in front, and simultaneously the chapel shook with the thunder of cannon proclaiming to all the city that the solemn act was over. Again and again did the artillery peal, and the sound appeared quite in harmony with the "Hallelujahs" of the choir and organ which burst forth as soon as the clergyman had pronounced the Benediction, and continued until Prince William had quitted the castle with his wedded wife.

The religious ceremony being over, the Emperor and Empress, the Crown Prince and Princess, followed by all their Court and guests, went from the chapel in State into the Gold, or Drap-d'or, Chamber, to present their congratulations to the newly married pair, and then away to the White Salon, blazing with crystal chandeliers, in order to hold high court, and receive the obeisance from the magnates left behind in the chapel, who marshalled themselves and filed past the throne, and paid their homage at the feet of their majesties and the wedded pair. For two hours these various high ceremonies were carried on, and the bride and bridegroom had to receive congratulations. Nor was this all, they had to take the front rank in the several festivities during the night. It was wonderful how that beautiful though slight frame endured all this fatigue, but the Princess bore up surprisingly, with a gracious smile for every one.

It has been reported that the Royal pair are accounted so happy that were they in a humble sphere in England they could have laid claim to the Flitch of Bacon at Dunmow. Fourteen months after marriage a daughter was born to them, which made the second great-grandchild of the Queen. To persons in high authority in Germany the sex of the child was a disappointment, as they like to see the direct line of the throne for several generations substantiated; but inasmuch as this little girl's great-grandfather on the paternal side, the Emperor William, was hale and hearty when she was born, though eighty-five years of age, that her grandfather, next in succession to the throne, was only a little over fifty, and her father just twenty-three, if it had chanced to be a son and heir he would, in all human probability, have had to wait very long before he could wear the crown.

It matters not, however; the Imperial power of Prussia is great, she has amalgamated within a few years lesser states, so as to make a united Germany, which all add to the revenue of the Imperial Crown; and the Emperor of Germany ranks as the leading power of Europe. The English social relationship which has been established certainly assists materially in diplomatic arrangements; and so long as England and Germany are united, the two nations can fear no foreign foe. This necessarily causes English people to take a deep interest in the domestic matters of Germany; and however remote from the throne the little Princess just born may be, a natural question arises whether she will be brought up with a love and respect for England, or will she fall into adversaries' hands who will poison her mind against Germany's best friend. Many of us may not live to see it; but perhaps this great-grandchild of the Emperor of Germany, whose grandmother is a daughter of the Queen of England, may marry in twenty years' time one of England's bitterest foes; and then the power of woman may prevail, and she may claim that the parents who gave her birth loved and respected England. We are sure that Prince William, like his father and his mother, like his grandfather and his grandmother, love the English people; and we know that the daughter of the grand Duke of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Augustenburg has a real affection for Queen Victoria, and that the late Prince Consort's name is as highly respected in that German state as it is in England. Therefore this union of the Prince and his bride was popular in this country, and the birth of a daughter was accepted as an event likely to be followed by an heir to the crown.

# 'BONNIE DUNDEE.'

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE LOVE THAT ENDURED," "A MONTH'S ROMANCE," ETC.

## CHAPTER I.



discarded with our French and German exercises, when we merge into young ladyhood, and begin to consider what effect may be produced by our first appearance in a ball-room. As long as we lived Kate Dundee and I would love each other with that strong, undying affection which women sometimes bear to one another.

She had been in India seven years when she died rather suddenly, leaving her husband with an infant daughter, barely two years old, and the memory of a happiness which could never be lived over again. In the years that followed I seldom heard from, or of, Captain Dundee ; but the accounts I did receive were always favourable.

I had married three years after Mrs. Dundee's death—just in time to escape becoming an old maid. My husband, Mr. Mercier, was a man of substance, and his name was great on 'Change. He lived in a handsome house in Queen's Gate, when he was not at his country-seat in Hertfordshire. He had been a widower for two years when I met him and his little son one summer in Brighton ; and after a short acquaintance we agreed to take each other for better and for worse.

I never had a child of my own to call me mother ; but had I been blessed with a dozen, not one of them could ever have supplanted Henry Mercier in my affections. Brave, manly, sunny Henry ! I can hear him yet as he used to come leaping and bounding along, boy-fashion, whistling some popular street melody until he reached the drawing-room door, when he would assume a preternatural gravity, and enter with decorum ; for his father was a stern, austere man, whose own boyhood, if he really ever had any such careless, happy time, had been buried in one of Oblivion's deepest graves for forty years.



CALLED her "Bonnie Dundee" the first time I ever saw her. Seas roll between us now, and I shall never see her lovely face again upon this side of eternity ; but I fondly cherish the memory of that dull November day when she came through the gloom and darkness of a London fog to gladden my home for a few brief years, and then, alas ! to cast a shadow over it which neither time nor distance can ever banish.

Her name was Eulalie Dundee. Her mother and I had been friends at school twenty years before. When she married Ensign Dundee, and sailed with him to the distant East, we exchanged no vows of eternal fidelity—it was not necessary. Our friendship was not of the usual school-girl description, which in nine cases out of ten is

I repeat that I heard nothing directly from Captain Dundee for many years, and I had almost forgotten him, when, one day, a letter edged with black and bearing strange Indian postmarks was handed to me. We (that is, Henry and I), were at Busking Hall at the time. I was sitting out upon the terrace. It was the month of August, and everything around—the trees, the flowers, the very grass beneath our feet—seemed brighter and more beautiful than in bygone summers. I had been gazing dreamily upon Nature's fair open face, and marvelling at its beauty, and wondering how my husband could bear to put it all away from him six days every week and immure himself in his dark, dingy office in Mincing Lane.

My reverie was interrupted by a footman bringing me the letter before mentioned. It was signed "Charles Dunbar," and bore a message from the grave. General Dundee was dead! He had died of fever at a distant outpost. Before he passed the boundary which separates our world from that mysterious one of which we know so little, he had told his daughter what he wished her to do when she should be left alone. She was to go to England and ask her mother's early friend to give her a home, and love her for the sake of those who were gone. She was amply provided for so far as means were concerned; her father had left her fifty thousand pounds, and almost as much again in jewels; but she had neither kith nor kin, nor any one to whose sympathy she could lay claim, save mine and my husband's. The writer proceeded to say that Miss Dundee was then visiting his wife in Simla. Mrs. Dunbar was very fond of her, and would gladly have kept her altogether; but General Dundee's dying wishes could not be set aside. With my permission, which she would wait for, she purposed leaving India in the beginning of October, arriving in London some time in November.

The suddenness of the news over-powered me; and sitting there in the warm August sunshine, I covered my face with my hands, and wept bitterly; but a quick, light step came along the terrace crunching the gravel, and a pair of strong young arms were softly wound about my neck.

"What! crying, mother? What on earth is the matter? Has anything happened to anybody?"

For answer, I silently handed him Captain Dunbar's letter. He read it carefully to the end, then replacing it in the envelope, said, "Of course she must come."

We shall do all we can to make her feel at home with us, and happy."

"But your father, Henry?" I asked hesitatingly. "What about him?"

"He will not object; he cannot possibly. Why, she brings the best of recommendations in his eyes with her—fifty thousand pounds. Even if she were poor, I don't think he would grudge her a home: he has his good points, and is considered liberal."

"And you, Henry?"

"If she is a jolly girl I shall be very glad; if she is a painted doll of a thing I'll give her a wide berth, that's all. What a pretty name Eulalie is! How old is she, mother?"

"She must be seventeen. How the years speed on! I have never thought of her as grown-up. I have always pictured her a fair-haired little creature in short dresses."

"Just three years younger than I am! A young lady will brighten up the place immensely. I wish she were here already. You will have to go up to town to meet her. Welcoming young ladies to his domestic circle is scarcely in my father's line. This is the 21st of August. She can't be here for more than two months yet. We've plenty of time to get accustomed to the idea before she arrives. Take a turn round the garden with me, and we can talk it over and wonder what she's like. I think you had better send Captain Dunbar's letter to my father at once. He will effervesce a little at first, but he will be kind enough to her—never fear for him; and I know that you will be as good a mother to her as you have always been to

"How soon can they be here, Henry?" I asked impatiently, as my son and I stood awaiting our guest's arrival one cheerless, November day.

"In five minutes, if the train came in punctually. Hadn't we better sit down and compose our minds; or do you consider it more dignified to receive our new inmate standing in the middle of the room grasping a peacock-feather fan?"

I laughed, and laid down the screen which I had been unconsciously twirling in my hand, and the same instant I heard the roll of carriage wheels. "They have come!" I exclaimed, and my heart beat wildly with an ill-concealed emotion. Before I had time to go downstairs and meet her on the threshold she was in the room standing before me.

"Eulalie! is it you?" I gasped. I had expected to see the counterpart of my early friend—a young girl with a face as soft and gentle as a Madonna's, framed with brown

hair, and lit up with grey eyes. Instead, I saw a stately lady muffled in furs, and with a strange, dark face.

"I am Eulalie Dundee," she answered, in full, rich tones, which had a slightly foreign ring in their accentuation. "And you? Are you Mrs. Mercier?"

"I am your mother's old friend," I replied, as I took her in my arms. "You are welcome, child. Twice welcome—for her sake and your own."

For a second her head lay upon my breast; then, without returning my caresses, she withdrew herself from my arms, and began to unfasten the clasp of her cloak. I could see that her fingers were trembling, and she glanced around her in a shy, frightened manner. With gentle hands I removed the hat which partially concealed her face, and she stood with all her beauty revealed.

"How came such a magnificent creature to be Kate Dundee's daughter?" I asked myself. She seemed a bright vision from another planet, all fire and brilliancy. A warmer sun than ours had ripened the rich olive in her cheeks, and lit up her gazelle-like eyes, which glowed like lamps behind their long, dark lashes. Her lips were like flaming poppies; and her hair, which was twisted in heavy coils piled high upon her head, and kept in place by a jewelled arrow, was black as the raven's wing. She was only seventeen, but she looked full twenty; her wonderful beauty had matured early. When she was twenty-five she would scarcely look a day older. She was a woman for whose sake I could fancy men going mad and perilling their very souls if she scorned them.

"Mother, will you introduce me to Miss Dundee?" said Henry, at my elbow. I had forgotten that he was there, so absorbed had I been in the contemplation of her beauty.

"Eulalie, this is my son, Henry Mercier—my greatest comfort. I hope you and he will be friends and get on well together."

She looked searchingly into his face before she offered him her hand, as if she would fain know if he were trustworthy, ere she ventured to make his acquaintance. His manly, open countenance reassured her, and she smiled sweetly as she answered, "I am sure we shall."

"Are you glad to be in England?" he asked.

"I can scarcely tell yet," she replied. "It is so different from Calcutta and Madras. You are all very kind to me. I shall try to deserve it. Your English rooms are beautiful," she continued, sweeping

her eyes around the well-appointed drawing-room. "Yes, I think I shall like it; but is it always so foggy out of doors? Have you no warmth or light except within your dwellings?"

"We have beautiful seasons in succession," I answered warmly. "You have arrived in our worst month? We have exquisite springs, and glorious autumns, and perfect floods of sunlight. November is a little dreary; but it soon passes. Did your father never talk to you of the sweet English spring-time when he used to gather the early primroses in the woods and carry them to your mother?"

"No, he never did," she answered hastily. "My father never talked much of England or the people here. It was so far away, and he had other interests there."

"You must have been very sorry to leave all your friends—the Dunbars, for instance?"

"Yes, very sorry; but it was decided for me. I had to yield to circumstances."

"You will not regret what may seem hard lines now when you have been here a year," said Henry.

"A year! Oh, I don't know what may happen before then," she exclaimed, wringing her hands despairingly, and a look of speechless anguish filled her beautiful eyes. "I may be dead in a year! I almost hope I shall. It would be better than living on. Life is very hard to bear—don't you find it so, Mrs. Mercier?"

"No, Eulalie; I cannot say that I do. Every rose has its thorns, to be sure" (I thought of Mr. Mercier's temper); "but viewed as a whole, life is a grand thing. Good men and women can make it a beautiful thing."

Eulalie's face grew ghastly pale, and she would have fallen at my feet if I had not caught her and almost dragged her to a sofa.

"Why, in the name of wonder, don't you take her to her room and let her rest, and not begin to discuss the vexed question 'Is life worth living?' the instant she comes into the house?" said the practical Henry. "I don't believe she has had a hing to eat or drink for hours. She is fainting from sheer exhaustion."

"I believe you are right," I murmured with contrition. "Go and bring a glass of sherry at once."

"I beg your pardon, but I am so tired," said Eulalie, opening her eyes. "I have not quite recovered yet from the effects of the voyage."

"Of course you have not. Drink this and then come upstairs. You will feel better after a good night's rest."

She drank off the sherry, then gathered up her cloak and hat, saying, “I am better now. I will go upstairs at once.”

I led the way to her room, and she followed me with slow, feeble steps. “Give me your keys,” I said, “and I will unlock your boxes. My maid shall attend to you until you get one of your own. I would have engaged one beforehand, but thought you might possibly bring one with you.”

“I had no attendant on the voyage,” she answered, as she took a bunch of keys from her hand-bag and began to detach one from the ring; “nor do I wish for one now. I prefer to wait upon myself.”

“But you cannot, Eulalie. No girl in your position is without a maid. You cannot keep your wardrobe in order yourself.”

“At all events, I intend to try. A maid fidgeting about would drive me distracted. If you will, kindly unlock the largest trunk; the rest can wait.”

“This one, dear?”

“No; for Heaven’s sake, no! I never wish to see the contents of that one any more. My old Indian dresses, and things which I shall never wear again, are all in there. I would as soon open a grave as that box. This is the key of it.” She held up the one she had detached from the ring. “I mean to keep it in a safe place where no one can ever find it. Perhaps I ought to have left the things behind me; but I couldn’t make up my mind to do that.”

“I understand, dear. No one shall ever touch it. I will have it removed to a safe place, and put under lock and key.”

“Thank you. Do you dress in full toilette for dinner?” The question surprised me, for General Dundee had moved in the best society in India; and so far as my knowledge of Anglo-Indian manners and customs went, the ladies there dressed very much the same as at home.

“Not when we are alone, as we are tonight,” I answered. “A plain silk or untrimmed satin will do nicely.”

She lifted out the tray from the trunk which I had unlocked, and from its depths produced a garment which fairly took my breath away. It was of gorgeously striped gold and scarlet satin, and heavy with trimmings of old lace thickly studded with seed pearls. “This is the plainest thing I have; I suppose it will do?” she said.

“Well, scarcely, Eulalie. I think it is rather stylish for a quiet evening at home. You see Mr. Mercier is a little particular. Excuse me saying anything about it, but I expected to find you in mourning.”

“In mourning! Oh, no, I dislike black exceedingly—the smell of crape always makes me ill.”

“But you ought to wear it a few months, for appearance’ sake. People will talk if you do not.”

“Let them. They will not talk to me. No one shall ever induce me to wear mourning. It is a horrible idea. It puts me in mind of the cold, black earth, and worms, and the long, narrow coffins. Don’t speak of it, please.”

“I shall not refer to it again, as you seem quite decided. You need not dress for hours yet. We do not dine till eight. I think you should lie down and try to sleep. I hope you will find everything comfortable. If you should happen to want anything be sure you ring.”

Giving a final poke to the fire, I turned to leave the room, when she called me back. “What is it, dear?” I asked.

She had unbound her hair, and it fell around her shoulders like a long, dark veil, and her eyes were luminous with tears. “I wish to say something to you, Mrs. Mercier. If I do not appear grateful to you for all your kindness it is because I don’t know how to show it. I feel it from the depths of my heart, I really do; but I can never put it into words. I am quite alone in the world. Will you love me a little and let me love you? I have no one else to care for me. I know that I am an intruder here; but it is not my fault—not my fault,” she repeated sadly.

“You are at home, Eulalie,” I returned, and I gathered her once more to my heart. “How can any one be an intruder in their rightful place? I love you very much. I did before I saw you. Your father left you to me, and I look upon you as a precious charge to guard and cherish until some one takes you from me, to place you in a home of your own.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Mercier. I shall never forget your words. Some day you may regret having said them. When you do—that is, if you ever do—don’t be too hard upon me.”

“Child, you are high-strung and fanciful. Be happy to-day, and leave the future alone. I shall not talk more to you now—you are not fit for it. Perhaps you would rather not come down to dinner. If you would prefer it I will bring you something up here—a wing of a bird, and a little jelly.”

“Oh, no, I would rather come down. I shall be quite rested in an hour, and I wish to fall into English ways at once. I have brought you a few things, Mrs. Mercier—some shawls, and a box of ornaments for the rooms. I scarcely know what. I didn’t select them myself. I will unpack them to-morrow.”

"It was very thoughtful of you, dear. I shall prize them exceedingly. I keep all my rarest treasures at Busking Hall. Your gifts shall decorate the rooms there."

"Busking Hall! Where is that? Is this not your home, then?"

"Oh, yes; but Mr. Mercier has two houses—most well-to-do Englishmen have. You must remember that I wrote to you from there last August."

"I remember now: I had forgotten."

"Busking is a fine old pile, dating back to the days of Queen Elizabeth. This is merely a house kept on for convenience when we are in town."

On descending to the drawing-room, I found Mr. Mercier and Henry engaged in a sprightly conversation, of which Eulalie was the subject.

"I think she is the most beautiful girl I ever saw in my life," Henry was intimating warmly, as I closed the door softly behind me. Mr. Mercier could not bear violent slamming of doors, in fact he inveighed against all noise except what he made himself.

"Your life has not gone very far, so I don't set great store by your opinion. I don't admire her, and I disliked her the instant she stepped out of the train."

"Disliked her, Mr. Mercier?" I exclaimed, in surprise. "Surely not!"

"Yes, I did," he shouted so emphatically that he grew quite red in the face. "Don't you understand English? I say I disliked her on the spot. I can't put up with those haughty ways and airs she gives herself. She is more like a French actress than an English officer's daughter. As for her luggage! I thought you carried a good deal of lumber about with you when you went to the sea-side, Mrs. Mercier; but I find I was mistaken—hers filled three cabs, beside what was on the carriage!"

"It's everything she has," I interposed.

"And quite enough too," he grumbled.

"I am sorry that you dislike her. I hope you will have the grace to conceal it, as the knowledge would certainly make her uncomfortable."

"What do you take me for? Do you think I'd be rude to a lady under my own roof, though I hated her like poison? She is my guest, and shall be treated as such by me. I have ordered up a bottle of the special port for her: there's nothing like a glass of good old port for setting one up when they're dead beat and off a journey. No, certainly, I shall not tell her that I dislike her, but I do. Now drop the subject, please. Henry, I wish to know what you are grinning at?"

"At you, father," was the prompt reply.

"I suspected as much. Sons treat their parents nowadays with a scorn which they have not even the good manners to hide. It was different when I was young."

"Why will you always misunderstand me? I was smiling at you, but not in a scornful way; I hope I shall never do that. The truth is I was thinking how much worse your bark is than your bite. You profess to hate this girl, yet you order up a bottle of wine fit to place before prelates and princes because she looks tired."

"There is a word in our language beginning with H—hospitality; and most Englishmen respect that word," returned Mr. Mercier, slightly mollified.

"What do you think of her, mother?" asked Henry, turning to me. "Do you think you will like her?"

"I am sure I shall; but she is very different from what I fancied she would be. She is like none of her family. She must take after some dead-and-gone ancestor. Neither her mother nor father had those splendid dark eyes."

"Her manners strike me as being rather iced," observed Henry; "but perhaps she will thaw under the influence of our genial society."

"Everything is new and foreign to her. Any little stiffness will wear off when she gets accustomed to us. I am certain that hers is a warm and loving nature. Poor girl! how strange it is that Kate Dundee's daughter should have come to me for a home."

"It is not strange at all," returned Henry, who took the most commonplace view of everything. "Where else could she have gone? Will you play 'Bonnie Dundee'?"—he opened the grand piano as he spoke—"I am consumed with a sudden longing to hear that divine melody. Perhaps a little music may soothe the governor?" he added mischievously.

If Mr. Mercier really disliked Eulalie he did violence to his feelings and honoured her with unusual attention during dinner, loading her plate with choicest morsels, and urging her to taste of his most costly wines. She had put on the gaily-striped dress, and in it she looked like a flaming tiger-lily in the first glare of its imperial beauty. She wore a number of heavy gold bracelets upon her arms, but no other ornaments save the arrow in her hair.

Overdressed as she certainly was, for our quiet dinner-table, after the first glance her costly garments seemed to be the most suitable she could have worn.

Hers was not the beauty which would show to best advantage in simple white muslin or cashmere—bright golds and regal purples and scarlets seemed made for her; and glowing gems, although they could not add to, must in a measure increase the dazzle which she moved in.

The hauteur which had impressed Mr. Mercier so unfavourably had disappeared, and given place to a gentle sweetness. I was pleased to observe the change; but Eulalie's expression puzzled me. Her face was a sealed book which none might read; and there was a strange, wistful look in her eyes which pained me. It resembled the piteous gaze of a favourite dog when it has been detected in some grave misdemeanour, and would fain crave forgiveness in the only way possible for a dumb creature to do. Why did Eulalie, so young, so lovely, and so well-dowered with worldly goods, look like that? I could not comprehend it, unless it were her over-sensitivity which recoiled from accepting kindness at strangers' hands.

She was quiet and reserved in her manners, and talked but little, carefully avoiding any subject which referred to the land of her birth. Only once did she warm into anything like animation, and that was upon Henry casually mentioning that he supposed she liked gaiety and dancing.

“The mother can take you to all the best houses in town,” he rattled on. “Wait until the Season commences, then you will be like the stars shining and twinkling all night, but invisible by day. I go to Busking then, and read with my tutor.”

“The Season cannot possibly make any difference to me,” she answered hastily, “for I have no intention of going into Society. I dislike the very name of it. I do not dance, so what would I do in a ballroom?”

“What do you like, then?” questioned Henry.

“Perfect solitude and quiet. I think I shall like Busking Hall because you tell me they can be had there. I never shall go out of doors while I am in London—it is too crowded.”

Mr. Mercier threw down his knife and fork and stared at her, and Henry looked as if he had said something which required an apology.

“You must not denounce Society without giving it a trial,” I said.

“Pray don't insist upon me doing that, Mrs. Mercier, it is not my element. I have read about balls and routs, and that is enough for me.”

“You surely went out in India. Were

you never at Government House, or any of the Drawing Rooms there?”

“Never; Indian society in the usual acceptance of the term comprised no part of my life. I was never in it. I have a nervous horror of meeting strangers which I cannot explain to you. If I were to strive against it for years I should never overcome it, so why should I try?”

“There is no manner of reason why you should,” said Mr. Mercier. “You seem to have very sensible ideas upon the subject. I never could see the sense in dancing every night for two or three months; and never did it. Mrs. Mercier is always chaperoning some silly, giggling girls here and there; they would be far better employed in learning to spin or weave. You shall do as you like, Miss Dundee. No one shall persuade you either way.”

The look of gratitude she cast upon my husband when he finished talking spoke more powerfully than any words she could have uttered. For an instant she looked as if a heavy burden had suddenly been removed from her; then, to our utter and united consternation, she burst into a paroxysm of weeping.

## CHAPTER II.

ULALIE slipped into her place in our household so quietly and naturally that in a week it seemed as if she had been with us for years. She was very sweet and gentle, but underneath her winsomeness there ran a current of strong determination which it was worse than useless to oppose. When her mind was made up nothing could move her. It was only in one or two instances, however, that she showed what Mr. Mercier termed “the cloven hoof.” One was in her steadfast refusal to meet strangers, or be introduced to any of our friends, which whim (it could be nothing else) brought about several unpleasant scenes. Mr. Mercier expressed a wish that she should show herself when we had guests at dinner, and she refused.

“Going into general society is one thing, sitting down to dinner with two or, maybe, four intimate friends of the family is another,” he remonstrated with her in his kindest manner one day. “I cannot command you, Miss Dundee,” he continued, “as I would Henry, but I will say that it looks peculiar. Ill-natured people may insinuate that Mrs. Mercier and myself keep you in the background if you never appear anywhere. There are two very old friends and their wives coming to dine with us this evening. One of them,

General Meredith, tells me that he knew your father well out in Madras. Naturally he wishes to see you and have a chat over old days ; so I hope you will be a reasonable girl and allow him to take you in to dinner."

"Excuse me, Mr. Mercier," she answered firmly, "but I cannot. I will not meet old Indian friends : it would be almost death to me ; it would be opening up old wounds and causing them to bleed afresh. I am happiest when I am left alone. Let me go my own way, and for pity's sake don't ask me to meet people from India. They would talk of things which I try every hour of my life to forget. They would revive old sorrows which Time has mercifully dulled. At the risk of being misunderstood I must refuse to obey you."

"You don't deserve any dinner at all. You are an incomprehensible, ungrateful girl," he retorted savagely.

"I may be incomprehensible, but I am not ungrateful. Oh, don't call me that !" she pleaded piteously, laying her tiny jewelled hand upon his arm.

He shook it roughly off and left the room, muttering something about "woman's variances."

From the first I had recognised her strong will, and never attempted to thwart it. I gave orders upon such occasions for her dinner to be served in her own boudoir, a place within whose sacred precincts no one save Henry ever dared to penetrate. A strong affection, which I saw with something akin to terror, had sprung up between the two. Her beauty had cast a spell over him ; and in a year or two boyish admiration might ripen into love, and a wife of Eulalie's temperament would never fall in with the views which his father entertained for him. Beauty and wealth were both desirable objects, but she would never assume a leading place among the aristocratic dames in Hertfordshire, or shine as a woman of fashion in a select circle in London. She would never urge her husband on to take a position among the great men of the day, or distinguish himself in the House of Commons. She was well born, but of what use are aristocratic relations over whom the grave has closed ? Eulalie was the last of her race and altogether indifferent to social state.

Already I saw rocks and shallows ahead ; and in my quiet hours I heard the signs of coming storms which something told me would one day wreck our well-freighted bark ; but I held my peace and said nothing. Each day she was growing dearer to me : all the love which once had been her mother's I lavished upon her ; and she recognised it, and paid me back in full

measure. Never was there, outside her few peculiarities, a more loving, devoted, and unselfish girl.

Soon after her arrival she had expressed a wish to carry on and complete her education, which, owing to her desultory life in India, had been greatly neglected. Accomplishments she had none, beyond talking French with a Parisian accent, and riding any horse in the stables without a shadow of fear. The first rudiments of a common English education were mysteries which she had never fathomed. General Dundee had taken none of the disadvantages into account when he persistently refused to send her home. With a humility which I pitied, yet admired, she craved permission to have private masters, and so far as she was capable make up for lost time.

Mr. Mercier, when I informed him of her wishes, suggested a good boarding-school for a year. "She is only seventeen," he said. "All girls ought to be kept at school until they are twenty ;" but in her case such a thing was not to be thought of. "Do as you like," he added, "only don't torment me about her. If she wants to learn High Dutch and play the Jews' harp let her do it. She has money enough to pay for anything. I wish Henry showed as much zeal in the matter of his education. That fellow absolutely knows nothing—nothing whatever, Mrs. Mercier. The only thing he will ever be fit for will be to rough it in the bush, or drive a dray : and he will come to that yet."

Alas ! my poor husband little knew how true the words would one day be which he prophesied so carelessly as he lay back in the most comfortable chair in his handsome library.

Eulalie pursued her self-imposed task so assiduously that she soon made up for past deficiencies, and surprised her masters by her aptitude and quickness ; but the close confinement began to tell upon her constitution. The only exercise which she ever took was an occasional ride with Henry ; and when spring set in she looked so like a fading lily that I gave up all thoughts of the coming Season's campaign, and took her to Busking Hall. There she gained strength and developed wonderfully, her shyness in a great measure disappeared, and she joined in any little festivity which might be on foot in the neighbourhood. She played lawn-tennis with enthusiasm, and soon learnt to row upon the river as easily as if she had been accustomed to handle the oars all her life.

But although she seemed the gayest of

the gay, and was the very sunshine of the old grey hall, that strange, pathetic look in her eyes which I have mentioned before never left her long; and in her most brilliant moods she would sometimes sink upon her knees at my feet and say, "Mrs. Mercier, are you quite certain that you love me?" or "Dear, dear friend, will you always care for me as you do now?"

She was standing near the window one day, weaving a garland of roses and ferns with which to decorate the village school-room. Henry's twenty-first birthday was on the morrow, and there was to be un-wonted dissipation among the juveniles in the form of unlimited cakes and buns, washed down by seas of lemonade, and later a wonderful intellectual feast of magic lanterns. She had laid down her work, and was gazing out of the window upon the fair landscape of sweet-scented meadow lands and green woods. I was watching her, thinking how beautiful she was in her morning-dress of rose-coloured sateen, with soft lace at the throat and wrists—she always dressed in the brightest colours.

She turned from the window presently, with a gentle sigh, and resumed her work, but her fingers moved more slowly among the roses than they had done before.

"You are tired, Eulalie," I remarked. "Never mind those garlands, some one else can finish them."

"Is Mr. Mercier very hard and unforgiving?" she asked, ignoring my suggestion about the flowers.

"What do you mean, dear?" I asked in amazement.

"If any one did something very wrong, and he found it out, would he ever forgive them?"

"I am sure he never would; he is the soul of integrity himself, and slow to pardon what he considers wrong in others."

"But if the person who had done the wrong had expiated it by years of repentance and remorse, would he still prove obdurate and stern?"

"I think he would; but, my darling, my 'Bonnie Dundee,' why do you ask such extraordinary questions?"

"I like to gauge characters, so that if ever I do anything dreadful I shall know what to expect."

"You will never do anything wrong. Your mother's daughter could not."

She turned pale, as she always did when her dead mother's name was mentioned; then she laughed, a dry, mirthless laugh. "And you, Mrs. Mercier," she continued, "could you forgive such a person if she had repented?"

"I think I could, dear. If the sin had been against myself I would try to, for the Bible tells us to forgive one another, as we hope to be forgiven."

"If a poor girl were to come to you some night and say, 'I am all that is vile. I have done a great evil, and every one has turned against me; and if the snow lay thick upon the earth, and the winds were howling around the house, and she had no roof under which she could lay her poor, sin-burdened head, would you take her in and warm her, and give her food and wine, and let her sleep in one of your soft white beds?'

"I cannot say; perhaps I would."

"Oh, say yes, dear Mrs. Mercier, say yes. Maybe the girl did the something wrong in a moment of terrible temptation; perhaps she was very young, perhaps she had never known a mother's loving care, but was a poor little stray thing who had been buffeted about all her days. Say that you would take her in. Surely you would not turn her from your door?"

"Why do you excite yourself so over imaginary cases, Eulalie? The chances are that I would take the poor creature in; I am almost sure I would. My humanity is not likely to be put to such a test, however. Where did you get all your romantic ideas?"

"They are not romantic, they are as real as real can be."

"At all events, they are unlikely."

"Do you see this locket, Mrs. Mercier?" She pointed to one nestling among the lace at her throat. It was of dead gold, with her initials "E.D." interlaced upon the surface in red and white enamel. I had observed it before; it was one she often wore.

"Yes, it is very pretty."

"Some day I shall give it to you. I may be soon, it may be years hence, I cannot tell. There is a portrait in it, but you cannot see it now. I got a jeweller to solder it, and only a jeweller can open it again."

"Why did you take such a strange precaution?"

"Because it contains a dead face which I do not wish any one to see until you do."

"Is it your mother's, Eulalie?"

"Oh, no, I have no portrait of her. It is some one you never knew or saw."

"Do you know where Henry is?" I asked, anxious to give the conversation a more pleasant turn.

"No; I wish he would come in. I must have some one to help me to nail up these garlands. Do you think they will be faded by to-morrow?"

"Their first freshness will be gone, but the effect will still be pretty."

"Are there any strangers coming?"

"Only the Challoners from Rice Court."

"The Challoners! He is a baronet, I think."

"Yes, he has one daughter, Alice, a pretty girl about seventeen. You have not seen her yet, she has been at school in Paris for three years."

"Is she an only child?"

"Yes; consequently an heiress. Rice Court will eventually be hers."

"I envy that girl, Mrs. Mercier."

"Envy her! why?"

"Because I am sure she is happy, and I am not."

"Why are you unhappy? Is there anything vexing you that I can help to drive away? Is there anything that Mr. Mercier or I can get for you? You have only to speak, dear, we shall do our utmost to make things pleasanter for you."

"You can do nothing more. I wish that I were far away on some desert island with a horse and a dog for company. If there were plenty of flowers and a river for fishing, and fruit upon the trees to pluck and eat when I became hungry, I think I could be happy."

"What a picture of desolation! Surely dear old Busking is far better than any desert island."

"Better for you, not for me. I am not like that pretty girl at Rice Court. I have had a wandering, an almost vagrant life, and the trammels of civilisation are irksome to me. I feel like a bird beating its heart out against the cruel bars of its cage."

"Your father was a man of refinement. Civilisation is no new phase of experience to you."

"In the abstract it is. In India I had no settled home. May I remain here when you go back to London?"

"Do you mean alone?"

"Yes, with the servants. The old housekeeper is a good creature, and would be kind to me."

"Mr. Mercier would never allow it. You would die of melancholy in a week if you were left alone in this great house."

"I do not care for London, and I love Busking," she said wearily. "I can be out of doors here all day long, bareheaded if I like. I shall pine for the desert island when we return to that dismal Queen's Gate."

"I do not think you will. Now that you have begun to go out a little you must keep it up. I shall not allow you to sit so much in the house as you did last winter."

She shook her head and was about to answer when Henry bounded through the low window like a rocket, scattering the roses and ferns half across the room, and startling us well-nigh out of our senses.

"Is it nearly lunch-time, mother?" he asked. "I'm as ravenous as a wolf. I've been a ten-mile tramp and back again."

"Where have you been?"

"Through the woods and across the meadows to Rice Court. My old chum Tom Greenhill is staying there—run down from town for ten days. His governor is a parson in the East End, and he is his curate. He doesn't get the purest of ozone in Whitechapel, so it's a kindness to ask him into the country. I've invited him here for a week when he's polished off the Rice Court visit. You must remember him, mother; he coached me up in Latin two years ago."

"Oh, that Mr. Greenhill! I thought when you called him a chum he must be a boy like yourself."

"He is older than I am, but no end of a good fellow. He is in training for a missionary, and is going out among the cannibals some day. Don't I wish I were going along with him! I dare say they'd make pie of me, but I'd like to give them the chance."

"Is he very dull and solemn?" asked Eulalie, who had listened with languid interest.

"Solemn! bless you, no; he's full of fun. Watch him to-morrow. If he isn't the life of the feast I'm mistaken, that's all. He has a wonderful way with children. I've been round the slums with him many a time, and I've seen them wriggle out of their mother's arms to crawl to him. He's a rare one, is old Tom."

"Old! How old is he?"

"About five-and-twenty, not more; but he looks older on account of his hair. It's light-coloured, and thin on the top."

"Henry, Eulalie has been telling me something which distresses me very much. She says that she is unhappy."

"Really and truly? What's up wi' the bonnets o' bonnie Dundee? I'm unhappy myself sometimes; the fact is, all people who are endowed with reflective minds must have their times of depression. I'll tell you what I do, Eulalie, when I'm down in the mouth. I trot off to Tom Greenhill and tell him all about it, and he listens to me with a kind of laugh in his eyes, then he talks a little, and the upshot is that I go dancing home as gay as a harlequin. Just you do the same; he is interested in every mortal thing, from the fit of a dress coat to a pain in your little

finger. Confide in Tom and you'll feel better. Oh, joy, there's the gong ; that bit of Chinese metal makes sweet music to my ears. May I offer you my arm to the banqueting hall, mother ?"

"Henry, you are growing quite a man," I remonstrated ; "you must begin to put away childish, nonsensical manners, and conduct yourself quietly and with dignity."

"Like my governor, eh ? He has plenty of dignity well spiced with red pepper. I shouldn't wonder if I ended in being the very facsimile of him yet. The fact is, Eulalie, although my mother finds fault with me all day long, she wouldn't exchange me for the best-behaved youth in ten counties. Would you now ? Speak the truth."

For answer I could only smile.

### CHAPTER III.

**N**EARLY three years had passed since Eulalie first flashed upon us in her splendid beauty, and took our hearts by storm. The two last had been very uneventful ones, spent mostly in the quiet old hall at Busking. Henry was absent ; he was doing the grand tour, with his dearest friend, the Rev. Thomas Greenhill, for his companion. When we sat shivering around the fireside at Christmas he was strolling in the cinnamon groves of Ceylon's fragrant isle ; and when we were basking in our brief English summer, he was in the chill latitudes of the Arctic seas.

It was with difficulty that Mr. Greenhill had been persuaded to accompany him. His heart was set upon mission work, and he regarded mere pleasure as something almost sinful ; but Henry pleaded hard, and Mr. Mercier, without any beating about the bush, had said that unless he went as bear-leader Henry must stay at home, for there was not another man in England to whom he would trust him. I also urged the charge upon him, for I knew that in his hands my boy would be as safe as if he were in his father's house ; so finally, under our united entreaties, his prejudices gave way.

Mr. Mercier's health, which had been perfect for almost fifty years, had begun to show signs of frailty at last, like any other human constitution ; and a severe attack of bronchitis, which he caught soon after Henry's departure, had shaken him so severely that for six months he had never set foot in his beloved office, but remained tranquilly at Busking Hall, solacing himself with innumerable drugs and tonics. By degrees the house in Queen's Gate came

to be little used, which was a source of infinite satisfaction to Eulalie and myself.

Eulalie had settled into a narrower and more limited groove than quite pleased me at first. I had made one more futile attempt to induce her to go out with me in London ; then I gave it up, for she was not to be moved. She sought out pleasures for herself in the country ; and as months went by she appeared to grow happier and more contented. She devoted herself to music and painting, and the drawing-room bore witness of her achievements in crewel work. She read a great deal—books of travel principally—and spent three hours every day, wet or dry, in the saddle. She became popular in the county, and accepted all the invitations which came to her—a circumstance that puzzled me not a little ; it seemed so inconsistent with her behaviour when in town.

But she did more than merely make pleasant pastime for herself. In every lowly home upon the Busking estate she was as welcome as summer flowers. She seemed a bright visitant from another world to the poor cottagers when she sat with their children upon her knee, and listened, with sympathetic patience, to their long tales of hard times and domestic trials—how one son had "listed" and sailed for the *Ingees*, and another had gone to America—how one daughter had taken service in the great city, and another was going to be assistant to the village dressmaker.

She had no friends in her own position, no girl-acquaintances who came to visit her upon any more familiar footing than an afternoon call. She might have had them by the dozen had she cared to do so. I would have been delighted if there had been a little noise and bustle and sound of young life in the house, which was so still and sad without Henry ; but she formed no intimacies, and declared that my society was all she cared for.

Sweet, gentle Eulalie ! she did not know how much she was to me during those two years, when Mr. Mercier was battling fretfully with waning health, and Henry was far away. She never thought of herself ; she lived entirely for others. Even Mr. Mercier gave in, and owned that she was one girl in a hundred. The longer I knew her the stronger the impression grew upon me that there would yet be some great overturn in her life. No one ever had a face like hers but had some strange experience to go through, some story to tell before they died. She might develop into a heroine, or even a martyr. Other girls like her settled down naturally into blame-

less wives and happy mothers—in the end she might do the same ; but something had to be endured first, some dark threads had to be woven into the golden web and woof of her life.

I kept all my strange fancies to myself. I could not have confided them to Mr. Mercier, for he would have set them down as the incipient ravings of a Bedlamite ; and Eulalie would have looked me through with her brilliant eyes and laughed at me.

It was May, and in June Henry was coming home. I began to count the days with feverish impatience. Once he was safely back I felt that neither his father nor I could ever let him go very far away again. His father had sketched a plan which he expected him to approve and carry out. Nine young men out of ten would have accepted it without one dissenting word, and deemed themselves fortunate. He wished him to marry early and take up his abode at Busking. He had paraded all the young ladies in the county before his eyes in mental review, and from their ranks had selected one whom he considered in every way suitable to be his son's wife—the pretty young heiress of Rice Court. Of her perfect acquiescence in the matter he entertained no doubt ; he had broached the subject delicately to her father, and that gentleman had hinted that the uniting of two of the finest estates in the shire by marriage had already suggested itself to him.

When the consummation of his hopes was accomplished, Mr. Mercier and I, along with Eulalie, were to vacate the hall and reside on a smaller estate which had recently been added to Busking. There was a well-built, comfortable mansion of moderate size upon it, and the gardens were large and pleasantly situated on a sunny slope. With a little outlay it could be made a charming nest, and it was within an easy drive of the old place.

Ah me ! How we plot and plan, and build castles in the air, and count upon happy days to come, and all the while the Fates are preparing their thunderbolts to hurl upon our airy fabrics, and grind them into powder ; but all unconscious of what the future held for us, we talked on through the early summer days of what we should do and say when he came. And one morning in June, just when we were sitting down to breakfast, he walked into the dining-room as coolly as if he had never been away. We had not expected him until noon, and between surprise and joy we could scarcely speak.

For a second I did not know him, he had grown so tall and handsome, and his

short upper lip was ornamented with a heavy moustache, which altered his appearance considerably. Taking him all in all as he stood there, six feet in his boots, with his manly, bronzed face beaming, and his splendid chest thrown well back, he was a sight to gladden the fondest parent's eyes, and more than a parent's.

He bent down and touched his father's lined brow with his lips, while the old man's face beamed with an ecstasy I had never seen it wear before. Then, without noticing me, he turned in his gladness and folded Eulalie to his breast. "My darling ! My 'Bonnie Dundee,'" I heard him murmur, "you are more beautiful than ever."

I turned away my eyes, and a feeling of disappointment swept over my heart. I had been suddenly roused from a dream. I realised that my boy was a man, and that Eulalie held his heart-strings in her hand.

Henry had been at home a month, and in that short space of time he and his father had drifted farther apart than when seas rolled between them. Their views ran counter in everything. Try as he would and did, the younger man who had seen the world and enlarged his mental horizon could not narrow it at will to please his father. Their political opinions were as opposite as the Poles ; and many a wordy battle I had to sit and listen to concerning what to me appeared immaterial subjects.

Mr. Mercier might as well have attempted to twist an iron bar into a circle with his thumb and forefinger as to mould Henry to his will. It had almost been better if he had never come home, I whispered to my heart, if the household happiness was to be utterly broken up.

Mr. Mercier truly tried him sadly. If Henry arranged to go upon a shooting or a fishing expedition, as surely as the sun rose his father would make a point of requiring his assistance in going over the long rows of figures in the office ledgers which were now sent from the City every week for his inspection. If he chanced to mention that he purposed calling anywhere, he was instantly assailed with questions as to why he was going there, when he had not been to such a place. If he desired a horse to be saddled at any particular hour the dog-cart was ordered round instead, or *vice versa*. Between father and son I could not interfere ; each must wage their own warfare. I could not understand what had brought about such an unpleasant state of affairs. Henry was as lovable as ever,

and I knew that his father was both fond and proud of him.

Eulalie would not say one word in regard to the painful subject. When I touched ever so distantly upon it she would shrug her shoulders and turn away. Dearly as I loved Busking Hall I began to weary of the place, and long for the noise and bustle of London. If we were there, possibly Mr. Mercier, whose health was greatly improved, might resume his daily visits to Mincing Lane, and allow Henry to go his own way. In an unfortunate moment I suggested the change, and was abruptly informed that the house and furniture in Queen's Gate were to be sold, and I had better go soon and see after anything that I cared to keep, and pack up my personal belongings.

"You always abused the town when you were there, and sighed and whined for Busking," shouted Mr. Mercier (his voice had lost none of its power). "Now when I cut the whole concern, office and West End, you must needs wish to go gadding there. No, madam, no, I say! It suits me now to remain here, and I intend to do so. Do you hear and comprehend?"

I answered indifferently that I did. I had ceased to care where I lived. I only longed and prayed each night and morning for domestic harmony, or failing that, for wisdom to enable me to do what was right. We had several large dinner-parties about that time. I hope the guests had no suspicion what ordeals they were to me. Mr. Mercier's temper was like a smouldering volcano. I never knew what moment it might not break out and scatter consternation among them all.

I actually confided my fears to one or two very old friends, and cautioned them to keep clear of certain subjects which to him produced the same effect as the traditional red rag does to the bull. I fear I did harm, however, in my zeal, for a rumour gradually got abroad that my husband's brain was affected, and people began to look pityingly at me and timidly askance at him, as if he were a lunatic who had escaped his keeper.

#### CHAPTER IV.

**T**It was late in October. The yellow corn had all been reaped and garnered in, and the stubble-fields looked bare and unlovely as I walked across them to pay my monthly visit to the village girls' school, of which I was the patroness. Behind me, outlined against the clear blue sky, stood Busking Hall, a stately pile, with many windows and great

clock-tower at the end. I turned to look back at it, for it formed the fairest picture I had ever seen. Suddenly Henry burst through the hedge with flashing eyes and flaming cheeks, his favourite dog following close at his heels.

"Here you are at last, mother," he exclaimed. "I have been hunting everywhere for you."

"Do you want me, dear?" I asked. "Is anything wrong at home?"

"Yes, everything. I have had an all-round flare-up with the governor."

"Oh, I am so sorry! What was it about?"

"He ordered me out of the house, but I said that I would not go," he continued excitedly. "I have as much right there as he has himself, and I will not be sent to the rightabout because I presume to think and act for myself."

"What have you done?" I asked, almost sick with terror. "I hope you have not been acting in opposition to your father's wishes."

"But I have, though. I have done it this time. I think I'll go to South Africa with Greenhill; he sails in six weeks. I shall never be happy here, I see."

"Tell me what has happened, Henry?"

"Well, it began in this way. I was sitting in the music-room talking to Eulalie, when he popped in his head and shouted, 'Henry, I've something to say to you. Come into my room.' So I followed him into his den. Then he looked at me all up and down and said, 'Hum! dressed like a jockey, as usual—cut-away coat, and tie bought the lord only knows where. Go and dress yourself like a gentleman, then drive over to Rice Court, and propose to Miss Challoner.' I stared at him like an idiot—couldn't make him out. 'I mean what I say,' he went on, getting as red as a boiled lobster, 'and I'll trouble you to obey me at once.' I thought he must be mad. 'Can't you speak?' he asked. I said that I could; but I'd be dumb so far as proposing to Miss Challoner went, whereupon he got into a rage, and demanded the reason why. I told him that I knew very little about the girl, and what I did know didn't make me anxious to secure her for a life-long companion. I don't see why I should marry a girl for whom I don't care a straw, because her father's property is next door to ours. I will not! and I let him understand it. We had a little more conversation upon the subject, but it was not exactly of a conciliatory nature. So finally he gave me the choice of two alternatives—to do his bidding or quit Busking! I said I would

most likely do the latter some day, but not until it suited my convenience ; and that I would please myself in the choice of a wife."

"Oh, Henry, what shall we do ? He never will forgive you. He had set his heart upon the marriage. Why have you disappointed him so ?"

"I couldn't help it ; he shouldn't have counted his chickens before they were hatched. I've put up with a good deal at his hands and never winced, and given in to his caprices more than most fellows would have done ; but there's a limit even to my patience. He will find that there is a dash of his own dogged nature in me."

"Henry ! remember that he is your father."

"I am not at all likely to forget the fact ; but if he were my father a hundred times over I should claim the liberty of choosing my own wife."

"Miss Challoner is a very nice girl," I remonstrated feebly.

"Most likely she is. I will not argue the point. I have something more to tell you, mother, if you can stand it."

"About your father, Henry ?"

"No. I have done with that part of it. I went straight from him to Eulalie and told her the whole story—about the row, I mean ; then I asked her if she would marry me, and go away from this wretched place with all its bickerings, and she answered me—

"What did she say ?" I asked breathlessly.

"She said 'No.' "

"Impossible ! I know that she loves you—unknown to herself she has shown it in a hundred ways. She must have meant 'Yes.' Are you quite certain that she said 'No,' and that you understood her ?"

"I understood her too well for my peace of mind. She owns frankly that she cares for me—that's the strangest part of it ; but she says she can never marry me—that there is a reason—an insurmountable one, she calls it—in the way, which she never will reveal. Do you know what it is, mother ?"

"No more than you do yourself. She is a strange girl. I have never quite understood her. I wish she had never come to us, Henry."

"Don't wish that, mother, for I don't. I shall win her yet, in spite of everything. She is the one woman in all the world for me. For her sake I could endure poverty, exile, cold, hunger, anything. I don't mind waiting years, most probably I shall ; but I shall never lose hope of one day calling her my wife, and I told her so."

"You did ? What did she say ?"

"She moaned and flung her arms in the air, and asked me to forgive her. I don't know what I have to forgive. Then she grew quieter and said that it could never be."

"I don't think your father is likely to give his consent. Could that be the reason she referred to ?"

"I don't know. I scarcely think so. His consent will never be asked. I have chosen my wife and shall love her until my dying day. If she never marries me it will make no difference. Even if she were to marry some one else, I would remain single for her sake all my life."

"I cannot understand it, Henry ; everything seems to be going wrong. I would rejoice to see Eulalie your wife—she is suitable in every way. She is of good family and has a large fortune. Your father likes her much better now than he did at first. She made great advances in his favour during your absence ; perhaps when he knows that your heart is set upon her he may become reconciled to her as a daughter."

"No, he never will ; he cannot bear to be thwarted in anything, and he had counted upon Busking and Rice Court being joined. Whatever happens, mother dear, will you be my friend and hers ? Can I always hope to have your help and sympathy ? or am I asking too much ?"

"Too much ! Oh, Henry, how can you talk so ! Eulalie and you are dearer to me than my life. You were not in earnest, were you, when you spoke of going to South Africa ?"

"I don't know. I cannot say. The turning of a straw might decide the matter. I would go to-morrow if she would come with me ; but she will not, and I cannot bear to leave her again. Whatever I do I must make a change some way. You surely see the necessity for that yourself. My father's temper will drive me to desperation soon. I can't think how you stand it. Can you advise anything ?"

"Not on the spur of the moment. I never dreamt that things would go so far as this. How are you going to act towards your father in the meanwhile ?"

"I shall take no notice of our interview this afternoon unless he refers to it. My cousin Charles arrives to-day, and if possible I would like things to go on smoothly while he is with us."

"You are quite right. I had forgotten about Mr. Charles Mercier's visit. I hope he will make it a short one. Would you like me to speak to Eulalie ?"

"I would rather that you did not—at

least not now : leave her alone for a little while. Do you think my father would be willing to give me a regular allowance—a fixed sum every year, paid quarterly?"

" You have never been stinted in money," I said reproachfully.

" That's just it. I've had it in handfuls ever since I can remember. I've no idea what I spend. I want something definite—large or small, I don't care which. I would cut my pattern according to my cloth. If it wasn't enough to keep me decently I could work and earn more. I cannot remain at home much longer."

" Henry, you must not talk so ; when things are at their worst they always improve. We may all spend happy days yet at Busking Hall."

" May we ! " he cried, with bitter anguish in his voice. " Never, never ! We are too ill-assorted a lot to hope for that."

" Promise me one thing," I entreated, laying a restraining hand upon his arm, for he was turning impatiently away. " Promise that you will do nothing—that you will not even think again of going away until your cousin leaves. Then we can talk it over and view it in every light."

" I promise," he answered sadly. And he looked towards Busking as he spoke. It was a fair inheritance, of which any young man might have been justly proud ; but the sight of it brought no pleasure to him.

" I must go now," I said, affecting a cheerfulness which I did not feel. " I am late. The school-girls will be wondering what has become of me. Don't you think, as your cousin has never been here before, it would only be common courtesy if you were to meet him at the station ? "

" I may as well do that as anything else, I suppose," he answered gloomily. And without looking again in my direction, he whistled for his dog, and walked across the fields towards the gates of Busking.

I wish my right hand had been cut off and cast into the fire before I extended it in kindly welcome to Charles Mercier ; but in the course of events he had to play the part which that inexplicable power called Fate assigns to each one of us. He was a man over thirty, and very like my husband in appearance. In character I once thought him cold and merciless. Now I think I may have wronged him, for he only meant to be just when he broke my heart and sent my darling from me. He was a wine merchant, and well-to-do. He had a fine mansion near Liverpool, and a country seat in Devonshire. The

relations between him and his uncle had hitherto not been over-friendly, which accounted for my never having seen him until he came to visit us at Busking.

I hurried over my work at the school-house, and arrived at home ten minutes before the dog-cart, which Henry had driven himself to the station, drew up at the hall-door. I went out to shake hands and apologise for my husband's non-appearance : his man had just informed me he was sleeping.

" I am sorry to hear that Uncle George has been rather an invalid lately," remarked Mr. Charles, after the customary greetings were over.

" Yes, his health has been far from strong. He is paying the penalty now for doing too much in former years."

" I suppose so. My father used to say that Uncle George was chained to his office-stool. Well, he's made it pay. What a splendid place you have here ! You could plant my house and grounds in a corner of your park."

" Yes, Busking is very beautiful," I answered warmly. " We have everything to make it so—woods, and a river, and several very fine prospects."

" And a mansion fit for a duke to live in," he continued, glancing approvingly at it. " Henry, my boy, you are in luck. All this paradise yours some day, and an income in proportion, and no counting-house and business to worry you ! It's fine to be you ! "

Henry laughed, but made no answer. I knew what he was feeling at the moment, and I hurried Mr. Charles within doors to partake of some refreshment after his long journey.

" You are a small family to inhabit such a large house," he said, as his eye took in the noble proportions of the dining-room. " There are just the three of you, I think."

" There are four," I answered quickly. " Miss Dundee, the orphan daughter of my dearest friend, has been living with us for some years, and is quite one of the family now."

" Ah, indeed ! I was not aware. Dundee is an uncommon name. I have only heard it once before."

" It is rather uncommon. She is the child of a brave and well-known soldier, General Dundee."

" Do you mean General Dundee of Gulgalpore ? " questioned Mr. Charles, with interest. " I have heard of him ; he was both brave and good."

" The same," I answered proudly.

" How very extraordinary ! My father-in-law was in his regiment ; he was Major

Brownlow My wife and little Eulalie were playmates long ago out in Madras. I have often heard her talk of her, and wonder what had become of her. Such news for Mattie, that I have found her old friend domiciled in Uncle George's house ! She will not rest until she sees her."

"I wish you had brought her with you. Can you not send for her? Do you think she would mind travelling alone?" I asked eagerly.

"Oh, no, she goes about by herself a good deal; but unfortunately at this moment she is in Italy, visiting a married sister there. She will be home in a month; then Miss Dundee must come and pay us a long visit. Perhaps Cousin Henry will come with her if we can hold out sufficient inducement. I suppose my uncle's bad health keeps you pretty close at home, aunt?"

"Yes, I seldom go farther than up to London about once a month. A little change will do Eulalie good, she leads too retired a life here. I shall insist upon her accepting your invitation when the time comes."

"It won't require much insisting to make her visit Mattie Brownlow," said Mr. Charles, laughing good-humouredly, as he poured out a second glass of pale sherry and held it up between him and the light. "Capital wine this, aunt. Excuse me referring to the shop; but in one's own family such a remark is allowable."

"I am glad that you like it, Charles. Mr. Mercier is very particular about his wines. I wouldn't like to say how many thousand pounds' worth he has stowed away in his cellars. I don't know much about it myself. I drink nothing stronger than a small claret and water; but connoisseurs say that he has some very rare brands."

"I have no doubt of it," assented Mr. Charles. "You put me in mind of Mattie with your claret and water. You would scarcely credit it, but she is a teeto'aller; so is her father. I once asked her what induced her to marry a partner in a great wine firm, and she said that she fell in love with me before she was aware of my calling. A pretty good answer, wasn't it? I met her at a country-house and lost my heart the first moment I spoke to her. I wish you could see her, she is a pretty creature. I can't help picturing her delight when she hears my news; nothing I could give her would make her eyes sparkle as they will when she hears that I have seen Eulalie Dundee."

"I wonder if she is in the house. Do you know, Henry? I would like to introduce her to Charles at once."

"She is out—she has gone for a ride. I saw her start soon after we got back from the station."

"What a pity! She will not be home until close upon dinner-time. She rides such long distances."

"I can wait," said Mr. Charles. "When will Uncle George be able to see me?"

"Now," said my husband, entering unexpectedly. "I did not know that you had arrived, Charles, or I would have come downstairs sooner. Why was I not informed of my nephew's arrival, Mrs. Mercier?"

"Blake said that you were sleeping, and I was unwilling to disturb you," I answered.

"I was not sleeping. I never sleep in the afternoon. He had no cause or call to utter such a falsehood. I'll discharge him for it this very day. I merely lay down to try and compose my mind and feelings, both of which had been sadly upset." He cast a wrathful glance at Henry as he spoke, but the latter was leaning against the window-frame, looking the picture of unconsciousness.

"I am glad to see you here, Charles," resumed Mr. Mercier, staring hard at his nephew, as if to take in what manner of man his new-found relative was. "You're my only brother's only son, and although he and I quarrelled over our father's will, and you saw fit to take the matter up too, that has all blown over now. Family feuds are bad things, very bad indeed. If there's one thing I admire more than another, it is to see a family living amicably together, and good feeling existing among all the different members. 'Live and let live' is a capital motto; I try so far as I can to make it mine."

"Quite right, quite right," said Mr. Charles, looking amused, for his uncle's scowling face sadly belied his words.

Henry listened, and elevated his eyebrows. "I suppose you and your father pull pretty well together, do you, Charles?" interrogated the affectionate uncle.

"Oh, yes! The governor is a very easy man to get on with. We never have any differences, he and I."

"I envy my brother! I do, indeed! You can tell him so from me. You are married, I think?"

"Yes. I've been married these five years."

"And your father is, no doubt, pleased with your wife?"

"To be sure he is," answered Mr. Charles, in genuine surprise at the turn the conversation was taking.

"You married to please him, I dare say?"

"Not at all. I married to please myself; but no one could help loving Mattie."

"It must be a great comfort to have a son like you, Charles. A great blessing; my brother is singularly fortunate. Henry, I regret to say, is not so satisfactory as he might be."

At this juncture poor Henry, who could bear being talked at no longer, left the room, and in a few minutes I followed his example, leaving the uncle and nephew to continue their conversation uninterrupted.

## CHAPTER V.

**S**HE came sweeping into the drawing-room like a queen. My Eulalie—my Bonnie Dundee! She had dressed herself in flowing draperies of black lace, and a diamond cross flashed upon her bosom. The only colour about her was a morsel of scarlet in her hair. I cannot tell if it were a flower or a ribbon.

Mr. Charles had been walking in the park with Henry, and feeling slightly fatigued after the exertion, was lounging upon the sofa in an attitude more easy than elegant; my husband, more garrulous than usual, was seated near him. Henry, weary and anxious-looking, stood by the window. We all looked up as she advanced towards us, and for a second her beauty held us in a silent spell. She paused when she observed a stranger, and I rose and pushed back my chair (a slight, gilded thing—how deeply trifles leave their mark upon our memories!), took her by the hand, and leading her up to Charles Mercier, said—

"This is Eulalie, General Dundee's daughter, and your wife's early friend. God help us!" I exclaimed in the same breath, "what has come to you?"

He had sprung to his feet and stood before her with pale face and glaring eyes almost protruding from their sockets, his right hand was clenched and raised as if he would fell her to the ground if he dared, altogether he looked like a man suddenly gone mad and bent upon murder.

Eulalie returned his gaze calmly and haughtily, but I saw her cheeks blanch to an ashen hue, and a look which no mortal pen can depict crept into her large, dark eyes. It was something more than agony—it was hopeless despair.

"Who do you say this woman is, Mrs. Mercier?" he hissed out between his set teeth. "Tell me her name again."

"Eulalie Dundee," I murmured faintly. I was trembling in every limb, and could scarcely speak.

"You lie!" he shouted, "you lie! You are either a fool or a knave, madam! I have seen this woman before, and know her name as well as I know my own. All

London knows it, and her face too, and what she is."

My husband stood up and grasped his nephew's arm excitedly, saying, "What did you say, Charles? Say it again. Not Eulalie? Then who on earth is she?"

"Ask her," he answered. "She has played her part well for a long time, but she is trapped at last. Ask her what her name is and where I saw her last."

"If you are not Miss Dundee, who are you?" demanded Mr. Mercier, sternly. "What vile impostor have I been harbouring in my house?"

She stood like a statue before her accusers, and never answered a word.

"She is afraid," laughed Mr. Charles, "she dare not speak! Shall I speak for her, and tell you whom the guest you have delighted to honour is? Ha! ha! ha! She is Pauline Rodolphe, the great circus-rider, who was tried five years ago for the murder of her master's child! I was present during the trial; it lasted several days, and the evidence against her was enough to hang any one twice over; but the verdict was 'Not Guilty.' Her wonderfully good looks touched the hearts of the jurymen and saved her neck. From the hour when she left the court she has never been seen or heard of. How she comes to be here she must explain herself."

"It is false!" I cried, "you are mistaken. It cannot be true. Eulalie, say that it is not true, and though an angel from heaven were to deny it I would believe you and love you still!" I threw my arms around her, I kissed her white lips, I took her cold hands and clasped them between my own. "Speak, oh, speak!" I implored, "speak, and tell him that he does not know what he is saying—that you are no impostor, but my own dear child—my Bonnie Dundee!"

"It is true," she said at last, and she smiled as she said it, "I am Pauline Rodolphe, the French circus rider, and when I was seventeen years old I was tried for murder! Thank Heaven, you know it at last. I would not live the last four years over again for all that the world contains. I knew that you must find me out some day, and the dread of it has haunted me sleeping and waking. The worst is over now, and I shall sleep soundly to-night."

"You shall leave my house this very hour," said Mr. Mercier. "I am an honest man and cannot protect a murderer. If I did right I would send for the police and deliver you up to justice, and make you stand your trial over again."

"That would be impossible," she replied,

"No one can be tried twice for the same offence ; and this gentleman informed you that the verdict was *not guilty*. I shall leave at once, but before I go let me tell you my story. I entreat you to listen to me. I was very young and not like other girls. I never had a home or a mother. Oh, for pity's sake let me tell you all."

"Do not utter another word ! depart at once, and never let me see your evil face again," said Mr. Mercier, pointing to the door. "I remember you now. Your photograph was hawked about the streets for days. Where can my eyes have been that I never recognised you ? Go ! infamous creature, your presence pollutes the very air. I cannot breathe while you remain here."

"I was innocent," she cried. "I did not take the little thing's life. I loved it dearly. Surely you cannot believe that of me !"

"Silence ! Go," thundered Mr. Mercier.

She turned to leave the room, and had nearly reached the door, when Henry, who had remained silent through the dreadful scene, sprang after her, and caught her hand. "One moment, Eulalie," he exclaimed, "stay one moment. Father, would you turn her, like a dog, from your door ? will you not give her a hearing—a chance to explain things, and clear her name of the foul slanders cast upon it ? You may be a righteous man ; you are an unjust one if you will not. You call her vile and infamous ! I know that she is as good and pure as she is beautiful. Only to-day she refused to marry me, not because she did not love me, but for a reason which she said she could not reveal. I know it now, and it shall not stand between us. If it were as true as it is false—I mean the charge against her—I would still make her my wife, and deem myself thrice blessed in winning her."

"Henry, let go that woman's hand," said Mr. Mercier, "this is no time for bravado or meaningless words."

"You are right, sir, it is not. I am serious in what I say. Listen to her, let her remain, if it is only for a day or two—make some allowance for her youth and her loneliness ; or, if she goes, I go too."

"She goes at once ! accompany her if you will. Marry her if you choose ; but remember, from this hour you are no son of mine. You have no father any more than if I were dead."

"You have decided for me," replied Henry, and still grasping her hand, they both left the room. The same instant my husband fell heavily forward, with his face upon the floor. I thought he had fainted, and rushed to his assistance, but Mr.

Charles was before me, he lifted him in his arms at once, and carried him to a sofa. One glance at the poor twisted features told me that it was no passing faintness which had overcome him, but that worst of all afflictions which overtakes us sometimes even in our prime, and changes life into something more awful than death—*paralysis*.

The tower-clock had rung out the early morning hours before the subsequent excitement died away, and I was able to leave him in the nurse's charge while I went in search of my children. Vain quest. They were gone, no one knew where. Out into the great cold world, where my eyes could see them never, never again.

\* \* \* \* \*

"After life's fitful fever," my husband sleeps in Busking Churchyard, and his nephew Charles reigns in his stead in the old hall. Away across the trackless sea, where the feathered palm-trees deck the mountain slopes, Henry and his wife earn their bread by the sweat of their brows.

I shall never see them here ; but there is another, an endless and a perfect, life beyond the grave. If my husband had lived a little longer he would have cancelled the will which he dictated in the white-heat of his great passion and disappointment ; but it was not to be. For six months after that fatal evening he lay stricken dumb and helpless ; then gradually strength and speech returned, and with them his mental powers. He never asked where the children were, his anger was too great against them ; but he sent for Mr. Tanner, his solicitor, and told him to make out a new will in Charles Mercier's favour. He had originally intended that my jointure should be a liberal one ; but I had no marriage contract, and he possessed the power to reduce it. By a stroke of the lawyer's pen my fifteen hundred a-year became five, because I "had aided and abetted his son to rebellion." The just Judge above knows how groundless was the charge. Even with that he was not contented, but added a clause to the effect that if I ever bestowed so much as a shilling upon one calling himself Henry Mercier, or a woman named Pauline Rodolphe, I was to forfeit every penny of my income. He little knew the pride of either of them. They might have starved, but they would never have touched money of his.

After the new will was signed and locked away in the strong-room, he relapsed into a state of piteous melancholy, which continued for the space of a year ; his nephew was very kind, and came frequently to see

him, but he exhibited no signs of gratification for the attention, and rarely spoke to him. A change came at last, however. It was near the close of the year, and the woods were brown and golden in the chilly sunlight, and the winds sang mournful cadences around the lonely hall. One day I wrapped a warmer rug about him, and at his desire wheeled his sofa nearer the window. He swept his dimmed eyes across the park and away beyond the vale of Busking, then he turned and looked at me —such a sad, wistful look!

"Isabel, come here," he whispered.

"Do you wish for anything?" I asked, bending over his pillows.

"Yes, Henry—and, I don't know by what name to call her—his wife. Send for them. They are forgiven, and I wish to see them before I die."

Alas! too late, too late! They were far away. Eighteen months had come and gone, and brought no word from them. I knew no more where they were than he did.

"I cannot," I answered; "I wish I could."

"Did you not see them again?" he asked. "When I lay ill and helpless, where were they?"

"I do not know."

"Did you not help them to leave the country?"

"I had not the chance. I would have done so gladly if I had."

"Send for Mr. Tanner," he said some hours later. "I feel that my time is short now, and while I may, I must undo the wrong I have done my boy. Oh, Henry, my son, my son, if you could come back to me, only for an hour! if I could hear you call me father once again!"

I sent off a telegram to Mr. Tanner, summoning him at once; but before he could have started, a second and more serious stroke had deprived my husband of the power to ever right the wrong which I knew haunted his weakened mind to the bitter end.

## CHAPTER VI.

 CHARLES MERCIER and his family had taken possession of the Hall, and I was living in a little cottage near Kew when tidings reached me from Henry and Eulalie (I can never call her by another name). They had sailed for South Africa with their faithful friend, Mr. Greenhill, who had done all in his power to help them to begin life in a new country—a nobler life, with higher aims than the one they had left behind.

Eulalie had written out her sad story and sent it to me, with a prayer beseeching forgiveness for the deception she had practised towards me and my poor husband. I shall transcribe it in her own words, omitting nothing.

I was a poor little waif, about five years old, when Monsieur Harlin, the manager of the famous circus troupe which bears his name, attracted by my pretty face, picked me out of the gutters in Paris and trained me with unflagging patience until the posters and newspapers in general advertised me as "the first equestrienne in the world." About that I do not know, but I liked the horses, and rode them fearlessly. I went round the world twice with him; and putting it all together, at different times we must have spent about six years in India. My life was a hard one, but I was happy enough. I had never known any other, and I did not come in for such rough usage as the other girls, because as I grew older I became the leading attraction in the troupe. My salary was small, but my wants were very few. I always lived with my master, and his wife's cast-off garments supplied my modest wardrobe. When I was sixteen, Harlin's Circus pitched its tent upon English ground. Our success in London was unprecedented. We had three performances daily, and each one was crowded to suffocation. As on former occasions, the principal parts continued to fall to me; and aware of my value, I demanded a salary in proportion, which, after some slight demur, was granted. Although Monsieur Harlin's bank account was prospering, his domestic happiness was diminishing. Three months before we came to London his wife had died in Paris, leaving a delicate little boy of eighteen months to the tender mercies of any one who happened to interest themselves in him for the moment. I liked children, and fell into the habit of keeping him with me when I was at home. He was not a taking child, his small features were mean and pinched, and his complexion a muddy grey; he was also slightly deformed—his back was curved in, and the doctors said that he would never be able to walk without the aid of crutches when he grew up. I suppose it was his helplessness that made me do so much for him. I could not bear to hear him wailing and crying for lack of a little kindness. My master engaged a nurse for him when we got settled in London, but she neglected him sadly. I don't think she ever dressed or undressed him once during the six months she was in the house. About that time my master mar-

ried again. I had never seen his new wife before. She was a Frenchwoman, and had previously been in some situation. I think she must have been a barmaid; her appearance was prepossessing, and she dressed well and stylishly. Her temper, however, proved to be very violent; and I gave her as wide a berth as possible, which was not difficult to do, for she lay in bed until midday, and spent the afternoons in dressing and reading novels.

Poor little Eddy had a worse time than ever after her advent; she disliked him from the first, and made no secret of it. She called him an ugly little toad, and more than once I have heard her wish that he were dead. Several times I saw her strike him. She dismissed his nurse on the score of her being "nothing but a useless baggage," and suggested that he should share my bed. I occupied an attic room with a carpetless floor, a broken table and a chair or two for furniture, and a pallet stuffed with decaying straw, which did duty for my nightly couch. Such as it was, Eddy was welcome to share it; he was something to love, and I was very lonely. I never made friends with any of the other girls, and but for the poor little creature, I would have been alone when I was at home. I did not like Madame Harlin, and never accepted her invitations to "step into the parlour and have a chat." I used to have a fire in my attic, and I spent my spare time there, altering my ~~curious~~ dresses and trimming my hats, while Eddy sat beside me and played with one or two broken toys he had picked up somewhere.

One very wet evening I came home from the last performance drenched to the skin; while I was removing my clinging garments Madame knocked at the door, then entered, carrying a steaming tumbler of "something hot to keep out the cold." I was astonished at her unusual kindness, and thanked her while she made me drink it off at once. It was hot port wine and water, well sweetened and spiced. Eddy was fast asleep upon the pallet; she turned and looked at him, and muttered—

"Horrible little wretch! I wouldn't touch him with the tongs, yet Monsieur pretends to be fond of him. We had a quarrel this afternoon, Pauline, about him; he says that I neglect the brat shamefully. Bah! Who could be kind to a toad? Good-night, Pauline, I hope you will not be any the worse for your wetting."

If you will open the trunks which I told you contained my Indian dresses you will find my costumes there, and at the bottom six newspapers. You can read the trial

fully in them. I would rather not write about it. I cannot. Poor little Eddy was found dead at my side next morning—strangled, there was no doubt of that. They had difficulty in rousing me, my sleep was so long and unnatural. (The wine must have been drugged.) I refer you to the papers for the sickening details. Who did the dastardly deed I dare not say—it is one of the secrets which will be revealed at the Last Day. I was innocent, but no one believed me, and false witnesses rose up in numbers to prove that I had called the child a drag and a torment.

I was three months in prison before my trial came on. You know what the verdict was. I left the court with my good name torn from me, homeless and a beggar. I could not return to the circus, and every respectable door was barred against me. I had about three pounds in my pocket. What was I to do? One thing I would not do—remain in London. I cast over in my mind all the different countries I had lived in, and considered their respective merits. Finally, I wavered between India and New Zealand. I inclined most to the latter, because it was farthest away. I took half-a-crown out of my pocket. I would toss up and abide by the decision—heads India, tails New Zealand. Heads turned up three times. I would go to India—but how was I to get there? And what was I to do to earn an honest living? I resolved to leave it all to Providence. I slept that night in a poor lodging in Chelsea. Next morning I walked to the East India Docks, and there fortune favoured me. A steamer was on the eve of sailing for Madras, and the assistant stewardess had met with an accident and could not fulfil her engagement. I gave a false name and reference, which I had taken the precaution to write out in a stationer's shop on the way (my first step in deception), and was engaged on the spot. I sent a boy to my master's house to fetch my trunk, and the same evening the ship dropped down the river to Southampton. I kept myself as much as possible in the background, and no one recognised me on the voyage out. Once in Madras I felt that I would be safe. I had never been very well known there, and even if my wretched story had reached that distance it would be forgotten before I landed. Nothing is remembered very long in these days when something new is cropping up every hour.

I had been in Madras a week, and my money was sadly diminished. I had thoughtlessly gone to a large hotel, and the bills were enormous. Destitution stared

me in the face, and I saw no prospect of employment. Bitterly I began to rue the folly which had brought me there, when once more fortune favoured me. A young lady in the same hotel was about to sail for England, and wished for an English maid to accompany her as far as Brindisi. A second time I wrote a false reference, purporting to be from my late mistress, who had been compelled to part with me owing to heavy losses, which rendered retrenchment necessary on her part. Armed with my false credential I presented myself before Miss Dundee. She was a girl about my age, with a cloud of golden hair and a face like an angel's. (By the same post you will receive a small packet; it contains the locket which I used to wear. I said that I would give it to you some day. You must get a jeweller to open it. Her photograph is in one side, a lock of her hair in the other.) She told me that she had recently lost her father, and was going to London to live with an old friend of her mother's. She had intended to take her native attendant with her, but changed her mind at the last moment and advertised for an English person. I saw that she was struck with my beauty and manners. I had always been considered ladylike, so I concealed the fact that I was French, fearful lest it should tell against me. (Another step in my downward career.)

"I have been very ill," she explained; "and I feel as if I were going to be ill again. I wish some one to be with me who will treat me kindly, and be a friend as well. When I arrive at Brindisi I shall telegraph to Mrs. Mercier and ask her to come there and meet me. She does not know that I have fallen into bad health. If you decide to accompany me—I hope you will, for I like your looks (I wonder if you know how beautiful you are?)—we can arrange later what you shall do when we arrive there. Your late mistress gives you a high character. If you care to come I shall take you at your own terms; I have more money than I can ever live to spend."

I told her that I accepted her offer gladly, and would take what she chose to give me.

"Can you come to me at once—this very hour?" she asked eagerly. "I am all alone. My friend, Captain Dunbar, came here with me, intending to wait and see me safely off, but he was suddenly recalled and had to leave me. I am very nervous and useless. I cannot even pack my dressing-case. Do come at once."

"I have only to go upstairs and collect

my things; I shall be with you in ten minutes," I answered.

Miss Dundee was of a singularly confiding disposition; before I had been twenty-four hours in her service I knew everything about her. I soon grew very fond of her, and I served her well and faithfully—upon that point I have nothing to reproach myself. I had never been accustomed to illness, but even my inexperienced eyes saw that she was very weak, and fading daily, like a gathered flower. She could not bear the slightest exertion, talking quietly to me would exhaust her strength so utterly that she would lie back in her chair in a deathlike swoon, which sometimes lasted as long as an hour. Once, when she was in that condition (it was the day after I went to her) I became alarmed, and called in a doctor; he looked at her, asked me a few questions, then shook his head, and said something which I could not understand, but I caught the words "heart in a critical state. Should have left India years ago."

Now comes what will seem to you the most extraordinary part of my confession. And before I write another word I assure you solemnly, and by all which I revere, that what I am about to relate is no tale trumped up to exculpate my own actions, but the plain, unvarnished truth.

I never told my story to Miss Dundee—another fatal error on my part. My reason for keeping silent was not that I dreaded the effect such a revelation might have upon her, but a natural desire to forget the painful past as much as possible. She accepted and loved me from the first for my own unworthy sake, believing me to be as good and pure as she was herself. I had given her a false name—Helen Hart—and beyond once inquiring casually if either of my parents was alive, she never questioned me as to my antecedents, or where and how my earlier years had been spent.

We were longer in Madras than we had expected to be. She took a bad turn, and the steamer in which we had engaged berths sailed without us. I began to doubt if she would be able to go by the next one, when she unexpectedly rallied. It was our last evening in the hotel, and our boxes were already on board.

Miss Dundee seemed uneasy in her mind. She kept walking up and down the room, clasping and unclasping her thin hands in a despairing manner. I was busy putting the last stitches into a morning-dress for myself.

"That will never do, Helen," she said, stopping in front of me, and taking a

length of blue satin ribbon from my hand which I was converting into bows. "You cannot wear pale blue; it does not suit an olive complexion like yours."

"I know it, but I have nothing else," I answered. She laughed, and tossed a roll of vivid scarlet into my lap.

"You must always wear bright colours, Helen. I like to see you in them. You are handsome enough to wear cloth of gold and look at home in it."

I began to unroll the rich, bright ribbon, and she sat down beside me. She did not speak for some minutes; then she said, almost under her breath, "I shall do it. Yes, I shall. It may be wrong, but I'll do it all the same."

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"Helen, I am dying as fast as a girl can. I shall never reach Brindisi alive. All the doctors in the world could not make me. I have a great deal of money, and diamonds worth a prince's ransom. I am under age, and consequently I cannot make a will. If I did it would not be worth the parchment it was written upon. I dare say I have distant relatives somewhere in England, but I never heard of them, and care nothing about them. I certainly don't wish them to have my money and wear my jewels when I am gone. What I have determined to do is this: I love you very much — more than any one I ever knew before. I wish to Heaven you were my sister. Before we go on board the steamer we must each change our individuality. You must be Eulalie Dundee and I your friend, Helen Hart. Do you comprehend me?"

"No, I don't know at all what you mean," I answered in astonishment.

"Simply this; we must personate one another. I am dying, and wish to leave my money to you, which I am powerless to do, being under age. It is not Eulalie Dundee who will die, but Helen Hart. Then you must go on to London to Mrs. Mercier's and fill the place waiting there for me."

I let my work drop from my hands in horror as her meaning dawned upon me. "I cannot—I cannot!" I exclaimed. "You do not know what a dreadful thing you propose, Miss Dundee. My whole life would be a lie, and your gold accursed. It would be a mill-stone around my neck to drag me down; but you do not mean it—how can you jest upon such strange subjects?"

"I am not jesting," she answered, and her blue eyes flashed with a determined light. "It is my will, and you must bend to it. Do you not love me, Helen?" She flung her-

self upon my breast, and I felt her heart beat fast against my own. Her hair fell around her face, entirely concealing it. I pushed it gently back, and looked at her as I replied—

"Miss Dundee, I love you very, very much, but I have a will also; no weak, craven thing, but one which shall always battle for the right and conquer evil. I cannot do what you wish me to."

"You must, you shall," she cried, nestling closer to me, and showering passionate kisses upon my burning face. I put her from me, and crossed to the other side of the room. I placed my hands over my ears so that I could not hear the pleadings of her sweet voice. She came after me with faltering steps, and stretched out her arms like a child. Once more I gathered her to my heart, and, clinging to me, she fixed her shining eyes upon mine.

"You have come to comfort me in my desolation," she said. "If I were going to live, you should be always with me, and share all that I have. My wealth must not go to strangers whose names I never heard. You cannot overrule your destiny, I make you my heiress, and you are powerless to say no."

"I can. I shall. You cannot compel me."

"Do you think that you are strong enough to conquer Fate?" she asked. "If you try, most assuredly you will fail. Why do you vex me by even the semblance of a refusal! Think of the position which my name and fortune will place you in; you will go from poverty and obscurity to luxury and loving friends. A face like yours could bring all London to your feet. You will be admired, courted, feted; wherever you go you will reign a queen, and I, in my forgotten grave, shall live again in your triumphs."

"I must not, I dare not," I gasped; "I am poor, obscure, and friendless, but for you. I was born in a garret, and played bareheaded in the streets. I could never fill a fine lady's place; my humble origin would betray itself, in spite of me."

"It never would; I don't care where you were born, or what you have sprung from, you would grace a palace. I must tell you all about myself, and my dear father, and what I can remember of my mother, so that you may be able to answer any questions Mrs. Mercier may put to you. I shall give you the keys of my boxes, at once, and all the papers I possess relating to business matters. My friends in London have never seen a photograph or heard a description of me—they have no idea whether I am dark or fair: they never even

saw my hand-writing. Captain Dunbar wrote all my letters for me. I am glad now that he did. There will not be the slightest fear of detection. I shall guard aginst that in every way."

"But the sin! the awful sin, Miss Dundee!"

"How do you define sin?" she asked quietly. "By doing as I desire, you will enable me to die happily. You tell me you have nothing to look forward to but an unloved existence of toil. I must lift you out of it. Wherein does the sin lie? If I have relatives, in all probability they are rich in houses and lands, and my fortune divided among them would be next to nothing. Supposing that I have none, it goes to the Crown or Government, I don't know which, but I know that neither require it, and you do. It I were a few years older I could make it all right and smooth for you; but I cannot add one day to my life. If you will not let me die in peace my spirit shall come back from the other world and haunt you."

"Let it come!" I said defiantly, "Spirits cannot harm mortals. I shall never rob man or woman, queen or government, of a coin that is justly theirs. I would rather beg for a crust in the city streets if my hands could not earn it. It is my fatal beauty that has done it; neither sorrow nor bitter trial seems to have the power to impair it. If I had been ugly and deformed, you would never have cared for me, never have tempted me so sorely. Oh, say nothing more. Why will you sin against yourself, and me too? why degrade us both so utterly for the sake of a little gilded dross, and a few flashing gems, which can neither bring us happiness nor health, nor length of days. Love me as much as you will, give me my wages, and a present if you like as well; but let your fortune go where it legally ought."

A burning blush spread itself over her upturned face, and her eyes fell before my piercing gaze, but she was not shaken.

"You must not talk so," she answered, "you are unkind. I said before, no one can conquer Fate, and yours is sealed."

"No, no, no, a hundred times no. I think I am going mad, I scarcely know what you are saying; but my answer is no—no—always no."

"Say, 'Eulalie, I will,'" she whispered. She kissed me once more, and the soft, lingering touch of her lips broke down the walls of my brave resolution. The past rose up before me in all its vivid horror. The circus troupe, the ring, the flying sawdust, the glaring, gaudy trappings of the horses, the crashing music and the applause

of the admiring crowd. My poor attic room, my hard straw pallet, little murdered Eddy. The prison's gloomy walls, the jailer's unsympathetic face, the densely-packed court, the awful judge in his robes of office, the jury with their pitiful faces, my wretched journey to Madras! In one brief moment I saw it all—lived it all over again! Before me loomed the future, untried and unknown. I shuddered as I thought what stormy years its calendar might have for me. My weak moment had come, and my baser nature triumphed. I hid my face among her flowing hair, and bursting into tears, I whispered—

"Eulalie, I will." Do not shrink from me, do not blame me too severely, think how I was tried. Consider how great was the temptation.

I had said it—and my words could never be recalled, how bitterly I have repented them since no one can ever know! There is little to tell that you do not know. We went on board "The Queen of Scinde" that night, she as Miss Helen Hart, I as Miss Dundee. No one would ever have suspected that I was her servant; to the captain and other passengers we appeared two intimate friends going home to England together. For a few days I entertained a hope, a faint one, but still a hope, that she would live to reach Brindisi. Once there I would have instantly sent off a message to you, and with your arrival my rôle of deceit would have ended. She went very little upon deck, she shrank with a strange sensitiveness from seeing new faces. She lay all day upon a sofa in her cabin, and when her strength permitted talked of her past life, and built many an airy castle in which I moved as the central figure. It was only the last flicker of the candle before it was finally extinguished which had misled me; her vitality was ebbing fast. We had been five days at sea when she breathed her last in my arms, happy in the firm conviction that if she had sinned, the error so amply justified the end in view that she would be forgiven. I do not know what her early training had been, or how far religion exercised an influence over her. I only know that she was young, and fair, and wilful, and loved me dearly, and acted, as she thought, for my best advantage. She sleeps far down beneath the translucent waves of the great ocean. Peace be with her!

I lay my pen aside with one last longing cry for forgiveness. Forgive me if you can, but if you cannot, oh, forgive the dead! The fault was mine, wholly and entirely mine. I was the strongest in mind

as well as in body, and ought not to have yielded.

I shall also copy Henry's and Mr. Greenhill's letters :—

"**MY DEAR MOTHER**,—Knowing that a knowledge of our misfortunes and hardships would only make you unhappy, we decided not to write until we could send you a satisfactory account of our doings in this distant country, where we have found a home. I think now that we made a mistake. We would have had your sympathy and good wishes ; and cut off as we are from the civilised world, your letters would have been very precious to us. We are doing fairly well now, but there is no use denying that we have come through the hard since we left Busking. Our home here is rather different from that imposing pile. It is a mere hut of four rooms, but comfortable, and warranted secure from storms, and the attacks of the natives, unless they set us on fire some night. Tom Greenhill lent me the money to start with. An old aunt whom he never saw had died and left him a few thousand pounds before we sailed from England, and he insisted upon paying our passage money, and setting us up in everything. I have already repaid him half the sum. I now possess six hundred head of neat cattle, and other goods and chattels in proportion. I have seven assistants : two of them are English village boys ; the others are fine specimens of living native ebony. In ten years or thereabout I flatter myself that I shall be a person of no little importance in the colony. I like the free, open life we live here. Now that I have had a taste of it, I would not give it up to be a lord in the old country. The work is certainly not light, but every day is full of excitement and adventure ; and, above all, it is a more natural state of being, more like the patriarchal era than anything I ever dreamt of before. I had written so far when Greenhill, who is doing a noble work out here, came in and placed an English newspaper in my hands, then, without saying a word, went away again and left me alone. It contained an intimation of my father's death. The news did not surprise me, but awakened a world of bitter memories. I know now that I failed in my duty towards him over and over again. I was arrogant and proud, and never paused to think how my behaviour must have pained and disappointed him. Exulting in my youth and splendid strength, I never took into account that he was aged and frail, and weak in mind, and a sufferer. I made a mistake. I see and own it now, when eternity lies between us. *[There is a large vertical mark on the right margin of this page.]*

entertained more kindly feelings towards Eulalie and myself before he fell on his last long sleep ; something tells me that he did, and that your first letter will confirm the impression. Eulalie is happy, far happier than at first I ever hoped to see her. The past is a page turned back for ever. We never refer to it. The future, so far as our mortal eyes can scan it, looks calm and full of blessings. She has been my right-hand in everything since we came here. No occupation is too menial, no work too hard for her to perform. She is the good angel of my life, and the sunshine of my lowly home. We both bless the day that brought Charles Mercier to Busking Hall, and divulged the secret of her life, for it was slowly killing her. Whatever the opinion of others may be, I shall always hold her free from censure. The fault lay with the poor misguided girl whose memory we cherish as a sacred thing. Eulalie does not regret the loss of her riches any more than I do the non-possession of what was legally mine. I suppose my cousin Charles is the heir ? It is well ; he will make a better squire than I would. My father's great desire is not defeated ; he has founded a family. The Merciers of Busking have only to rid themselves of the taint of business to become great county magnates. I do not wish to know the particulars of my father's will, the details cannot possibly possess any personal interest for me ; but I would like to know how he has provided for you. If you have not the means to command every luxury which you have been accustomed to, let me know. I shall soon be a wealthy man, and surely my first care is my mother. In this I need not say that Eulalie heartily agrees. There is a message she did not like to write to you, and desires me to send from her. It is about the box which contains her Indian dresses and costumes, also several newspapers. When you have read the latter, will you, with your own hand, burn everything ? Greenhill is going to send you a few lines, so I shall therefore bring my epistle to an end.—I am, my dearest mother, your affectionate son,

"**HENRY MERCIER**."

"**DEAR MRS. MERCIER**,—Henry tells me that he has given you all the particulars of our life here, so nothing remains for me to enlarge upon. He was very downcast for a few days after the news of his father's death reached us. The fact of their having parted in anger is a wound which can never quite be healed : every now and then it must bleed afresh. His coming here was

my doing ; and if we overlook the circumstances which prompted it, I can safely say that I shall never regret the part I had in it. From the darkness of trials and adversity he has come out a noble man—a perfect character I would say, if I dared. Of his wife's beauty and goodness I cannot trust myself to write. My pen would never cease if I once let it run upon such a favourite theme. She is truly loved and respected by all who know her. Our colony is still in its infancy, but is growing fast. In ten years' time we hope to have a flourishing town in place of the few scattered huts we at present call a village. The climate is all that could be desired, and the scenery magnificent. Of my own labours I can only say that I try to sow beside all waters, and hope for an abundant harvest some day.—Yours faithfully,

“THOMAS GREENHILL.”

It was early in the morning when I received my precious budget of letters ; it was midnight when I laid them aside. I had read and re-read each page until I could almost have repeated every line from memory. I had longed and hungered to hear from them, and good tidings had come at last, far better than I had hoped for. My heart overflowed with thankfulness, I could have sung long psalms through the darkness until morning !

If ever I had silently grudged Charles Mercier his possession of Busking's old grey hall, the disloyal feeling vanished instantly and for ever. Everything had happened for the best. Each one was in his fitting place.

I opened Eulalie's Indian trunk and disinterred the old newspapers from the darkness where they had remained hidden so long ; but I did not read one word ! I knew that my darling was innocent, that was enough for me. I laughed as I watched the papers writhe in the fierce, hot flames and then fall apart in blackened ashes. Her dresses followed next, pretty bright things, heavy with tinsel and coloured beads. One thing I kept—a little toy whip, with a gold handle. She had used it, and I prized everything that her hands had touched. She had most probably forgotten all about it, for she never mentioned it, so I had no misgivings regarding its appropriation.

I took a journey up to London and went to a jeweller's in Bond Street with the locket, which I told him to open carefully

while I waited for it. The other Eulalie must have been a dazzling vision, a golden-haired white and coral picture ; but she lacked the stately grace and queenly air which characterised my Bonnie Dundee. No doubt I would have loved her if she had lived to come to me. I would have done so for her mother's sake, if nothing else ; but it was not to be.

A whole host of relatives rose up to claim her wealth when the strange tale got bruited abroad ; and as is not unusual in such cases, litigations ensued, and the greater portion of it went to enrich the lawyers.

As I was not permitted to send money to Henry and his wife, it was a great relief to hear that they stood in no need of pecuniary assistance. The prohibition did not, however, extend to presents, and many a useful gift from me has found its way to Xanthorpe. Small though my income is, it more than meets my necessities. I often wish that I could leave it to my dear ones when I die, but it must go to the already full coffers of Charles Mercier.

I sometimes think that I shall not need it long. The shadows are lengthening on the road, and I am growing an old, old woman. I wear caps and spectacles now. Henry would scarcely know me if he saw me sitting with my knitting under the grand old trees at Kew. I often drop my stitches and bungle the stocking sadly ; but the reason is not because my eyes are dim—it is that my mind wanders away from the knitting needles, and the sweet English flowers, and the groups of pretty children playing near me, and instead I see gorgeous buds bursting into flaming colours beneath Africa's fiery sun. I see rare birds circling through the warm air. I see dark-eyed boys and girls chasing one another under the shade of the feathery palms. I can almost hear their voices.

Fancy pictures, you say ? Ah, well ! they are very real to me. Some one asked me to write this story of my life, so I have done my best. If any one takes the trouble to read it, there are two lines which I would like them to bear in their mind throughout the pages, for they have been constantly in mine. They were written long ago by England's immortal bard—

“ There's a Divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them how we will.”

LEAH SMITH.

# TEA-TABLE TALK.—BY AMY KEN.

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**M**ISS KEN'S nieces had all returned to London, but Miss Ken herself was absent. She wished for a week's repose and to remain with an old friend in the Isle of Wight a few days longer.

"So," said Judith, who had previously invited papa, mamma, Uncle William, and Cousin Helena to the special party, "as Aunt Ken is not here, I am to be the hostess, and she has ordered me to prepare an extra amount of delicacies for you."

"We would have done without the delicacies if the lady only were here," said Uncle William.

"I declare uncle wants to pay aunt a compliment, and I must write and tell her so. I really believe," said Judith, with some hesitation, "that—that—"

"Well, out with it," exclaimed Helena; "what do you believe?"

"Well, if you must have it, that Uncle William is smitten with the charms of Aunt Ken; and, after all, it wouldn't be such a bad match."

"Judith," said Mrs. Marston, "you are really incorrigible! You ought to know that it is most improper for young ladies to make suggestions for their seniors; and for a girl of your age to speak to your uncle on such a subject is exceedingly rude."

"I wish to goodness you would, all of you, leave Uncle William alone," answered that individual. "I came here thinking I should for once be allowed to join in the chit-chat of these meetings. It is like being invited to a friend's house to spend the day and being met on the threshold by the servants, who tell you 'Master is out, but you can have anything you please to order,' and of course you go away and order nothing."

"I hope you don't compare us all to servants, do you, William?" said Mr. Marston, who was ordinarily a man of few words, but a good listener.

"Dear me!" replied his brother, "whenever I open my mouth I am sure to make some blunder or another, so hereafter I will do what a good servant should do—'Hear, see, and say nothing; eat, drink, and pay nothing.' I want to hear something more about the Isle of Wight."

"Well, we are prepared to tell you all we know; but in reality, we have all come away with that peculiar feel."

in our mind, that another time when we visit the sea-coast we would rather go to some more remote spot. It is almost necessary to see the island once in your lifetime; but you have so much grandeur all around you there, and if you see the chief objects of interest you cannot get away from fashionable crowds, who are on your path everywhere."

"Yes," suggested Annie, "it is far too fashionable a place except for persons who have plenty of money and willing to spend it. You feel so small when you cannot do as others do, and a little jealous now and then when you see the rich doors the golden keys unlock, which cannot be opened any other way."

"I do not quite follow you," observed Mr. Marston.

"She means this, papa," replied Judith. "Every waterfall or 'chine' of reputation in the Isle of Wight is subjected to the strictest discipline, and duly placed under lock and key. The easiest of gravel walks form the approaches, and the finest of fine ladies—

'Whose gentle heart cloth fear  
The smallest monstrous mouse that creeps on floor—'

may visit the lions of the island without fear of alarm or discomposure. You might just as well go to the Royal Horticultural Gardens or the Botanical Gardens on one of their fête days."

"I am rather surprised to hear this from you, Judith," remarked Mr. Marston. "The two days that I was on the island, when I went to escort you all home, a general impression of beauty was conveyed to my mind such as was never produced by any other part of England. Then, again, the picturesque rock scenery of the Undercliff from Bonchurch to Newport certainly cannot disappoint the most highly-raised expectation; and the sea-views are everywhere magnificent. Indeed, I was agreeably surprised rather than disappointed by all the scenery. I admired very much the interior of the island also, drive wherever I would; and I think the scenery is superior to that of any other English county. By-the-bye, Judith, you told us you had visited the Needles. Surely you were remote enough from human habitation then?"

"Oh, yes," responded Judith, "we did enjoy that; but it was almost too far for poor Aunt K—. She struggled

caverns, but had to give it up at last. I don't know what we should have done if two young gentlemen—oh! so very gentlemanly—had not ciceroned us. They warned us against every danger, and helped us over every obstacle, leaving their mother as companion to Aunt Ken."

"Oh, the secret's out now. In the interior of the Isle of Wight the ladies require no cicerones, the path is made too smooth for them," observed Mrs. Marston. "I shall take a note of that. Young ladies like obstacles in their path. Why? Because the young gentlemen hasten to their assistance."

"Yes; and married ladies may say what they please, but once upon a time they had the same desire," replied Judith.

"Well, don't let us wrangle about that," put in Mr. Marston. "Give us your opinion of the Needles; they are sure to remain true to their position long after the young gentlemen are forgotten."

"The journey we took round the island in a steamer was very delightful; the scenery appeared to change every half-hour for our special advantage. The course we took was Ryde westward, and we passed Osborne House with its beautiful grounds down to the water's edge. Aunt Ken must tell you all about this royal residence when she returns. We passed these grounds in about half an hour, and were brought abreast of East and West Cowes, where the course of the Medina in the south, and the view of Southampton Water north, with both Calshot Castle and the great Netley Hospital in sight, is very striking. The Queen happened then to be at Osborne, and therefore, as usual, a man-of-war as guardship was stationed off Cowes. The Royal yacht was also plainly seen, and there were many other yachts, beautiful specimens of their class. Beyond Cowes the island coast is for a few miles dull and uninteresting, though the little Gurnard stream and the much larger Newtown River have pleasant banks; the opposite Hampshire coast, with Beaulieu River, is much more picturesque; and with the naked eye you can see both sides. When we approached Yarmouth, lands richly wooded met our view; but soon the forest trees seemed to dwindle into shrubs and finally disappear, and we then caught the first view of cliffs rising one above another. Then came in sight red-brick forts on the one hand (Victoria, Cliff, and Warden), which combine with Hurst Castle to defend the entry to the Solent, and frame a very unpleasant picture. At this spot, for the first time, the Needles came in view before we reached Colwell, on the

and Alum Bays; and the rich colouring of the cliffs was simply grand. At Alum Bay there is a pier; and most of the passengers alighted for an hour's stroll; but we remained where we were, as we had been told by the gentlemen before alluded to that we should lose the most wonderful sight in the world if we did not remain here and visit the Needles, or at least get as close to them as possible, for it is a very different thing sighting them from a distance. Finding that lodgings were to be obtained here, we coaxed aunt to allow us to remain the night. Now, Alum Bay is described by scientific men thus: 'The cliff consists of first a vast precipice of chalk, and then a succession of vertical or upright strata of different coloured sands and ochreous earths, white, black, red, blue, and yellow; in some parts pure and unbroken, and in others blending into every variety of tint, and so bright as to be compared by the best writers to *shades of silk and the stripes on the leaves of a tulip*.' Well, I must confess that I think Alum Bay a wonderful place, but certainly if such an idea had never been put into my head the rocks, beautiful as they are, would never have reminded me of the leaves of a tulip. We went to the top of the cliff, whence we could plainly see the Isle of Purbeck, on the coast of Dorsetshire, Swanage Bay, Pebble Point, and the cliff called Old Harry. On the tops of the cliffs there appears to be no soil, but a fine white sand, on which grow the loveliest little flowers and mosses and gems of tiny harebells and yellow flowers that can be imagined. Many people get their livelihood by obtaining sea-fowls' eggs and capturing the birds for their feathers on the cliffs surrounding Alum Bay; but it makes your blood curdle to see the risks they run. Aunt Ken thought that the Small Birds Act would prevent the killing being legal now, but we certainly saw some actively employed in searching for eggs. Unable to get them from below by climbing, the islanders reach them from above by descending the perpendicular cliffs in much the same perilous way as is practised by the Norwegians and the hardy natives of the Faroe Islands, so often described in books. They drive a large stake or iron bar into the top of the cliff, to which a strong rope is fastened, and at the end there is a stick put crosswise for the adventurer to sit upon and support himself by, and with this simple apparatus he lets himself down the front of the horrid precipice."

"Thank you, Judith," said Uncle William. "Your account is really very interesting. I will visit the Isle with greater pleasure than ever all about it; and certainly miss the Needles."

## FA M O U S M E N A N D W O M E N.

### THE LATE GENERAL GARIBALDI.



NE of the greatest heroes of modern times died in his humble residence at Caprera, on June 2nd, 1882.

Most men whom the world accounts heroes have individual ambition, very few regard country more than self, and give up honours and high position to live in humble retirement after valour, perseverance, activity of mind and body, and a strict adherence to what they considered a just cause has culminated in the fulfilment of first designs under most arduous circumstances, and given freedom to a country which formerly suffered from bondage. It is difficult, in the ordinary space given for these biographical sketches, to convey to the minds of readers all that Garibaldi has accomplished in his comparatively long life. Those, however, who are old enough to remember the spring of 1864 will have vivid recollections of the great Italian hero's visit to this country, when the enthusiasm of the English public was excited to the highest pitch. The Duke of Sutherland invited this great man to visit him. The public knew that at a certain hour Garibaldi would arrive at the Bricklayers' Arms Station, Old Kent Road, and the masses were there in their thousands and in their millions to give him welcome, and the route to the Duke of Sutherland's mansion was crowded the whole distance by people who loved and admired the man. A dais was quickly erected, and deputations from municipal bodies and working men's societies handed to Garibaldi addresses of congratulation and testimonials of appreciation in the great work of reformation he had been the means of accomplishing in Italy, regarding him as the hero of freedom. The writer can well remember the benign countenance of the man, with his Italian cloak around him, of ordinary civilian form, in broken English rendering his thanks to the British nation, who were ever lovers of freedom, concluding thus: "I seek no honour beyond working in a just cause, and my reward is to see my country as free as the country of the British nation." Were Garibaldi's history written in the flowing language of the classics, or even in accordance with Biblical lore, it would have been asserted that he was a man divinely selected to carry out certain plans from on high. In the whole course of modern history it may be doubted whether anything approaching to a parallel can be found to the life of a man who, after a career of singular variety, practically created the Italian Kingdom, and, having accomplished his work, retired to a lonely island in the Mediterranean, whence he afterwards, though living as a humble

farmer may do in this country, exercised a most remarkable influence over the general politics of Europe.

He was born of very poor parents in Nice, during the year 1807. As an infant he had a very reflective mind, and would ask his father questions which puzzled his rustic intellect. Italian parents cared little for education then, but young Giuseppe Garibaldi found a schoolmaster who prided himself in the little boy's aspiring mind, and imparted to his pupil all the knowledge he himself possessed. "I wish to see the world," Giuseppe said to his parents, and he was allowed to adopt the sea to obtain a livelihood. As a fore-mast hand, when only in his "teens," he made several voyages between Genoa and Odessa, Rome and Naples, and wherever he landed picked up information until he became absorbed in the social condition of Italy. In some remarkable manner he got introduced to Mazzini when in his twenty-fifth year, and from that time forth he became an ardent Republican.

With the object of propagating his opinions he entered the Sardinian navy as an able seaman. "My mission," he says, in the curious book which Alexandre Dumas wrote at his dictation, "was to make proselytes there for the revolution, and I acquitted myself in the best way I could. In the event of the Republican rising which Mazzini was directing against the Government of Charles Albert on land, I and my companions were to seize the frigate and place it at the disposal of the Republicans." In this he was not successful, and orders were given for his arrest, but a woman who kept a fruit-shop concealed him for a time, and disguised as a countryman he managed to get back to Nice, and thence to the French frontier. Here he gave himself up to the *douaniers*, by whom he was placed under arrest and taken to Draguignan; he, however, managed to escape, and found his way to Marseilles. His name had now been branded by the authorities, and he was condemned to death *par contumace*; therefore, under the assumed cognomen of Paul, he shipped as second hand on board a merchant ship trading to Odessa. On his return to Marseilles he found that city suffering under a severe visitation of cholera. Except by the doctors and the Sisters of Mercy, it was deserted by all who could possibly get away, so that, in his own words, it presented the appearance of a vast cemetery. Physicians called in voluntary help, hospitals, and Giuseppe Garibaldi, with

young man of Trieste, who had come from Tunis with him, offered their services.

Sensible that the people of Italy could never be happy without freedom, Garibaldi made up his mind never to cease his efforts until tyranny was abolished, and he shortly afterwards made the acquaintance of Zambeccari, the secretary of Bento Gonzales, President of the Republic of Rio Grande, and through his means obtained letters of marque, and fitted out a privateer. The ship was a small one, its burden being no more than thirty tons, and its crew consisted of sixteen men, all told. With that equipment, in Dumas' magnificent phrase, Garibaldi "declared war against an empire." His first exploit was the capture of a schooner, the property of an Austrian who traded under the Brazilian flag. To this vessel he transferred the arms and provisions of his craft, and having scuttled her he sailed for Rio, calling on his way at Maldonato, in the Republic of Uruguay, to sell the cargo of his captured craft. Whether such an action may be considered honourable the reader must decide, but it is assumed "all is fair in love and war." Yet, may it not be said, retribution follows outrage? Soon after the event just recorded, Garibaldi was wounded in a skirmish with the Brazilians, and taken prisoner and conveyed to Gualequay. He was treated kindly at first, but was imprudent enough to attempt to escape, and being captured and brought back he was subjected to the torture of the stropado; his hands were tied together behind his back, and he was lifted to the ceiling by them. This fiendish torture, worthy of the worst days of the Inquisition, lasted for two hours, at the end of which time he was taken down and put into heavy irons. In this condition he remained for two months, and but for the charity of a lady named Aleman, he must have sunk under this treatment. At the end of that time he was set at liberty, and returned to Rio Grande, where he again took service with the Republicans, and set to work to create a navy. The fleet consisted of two roughly built sloops, manned with mixed crews of Europeans and negroes to the number of seventy men. With these he harassed the Imperialists very severely, doing an immense amount of mischief on the rivers and the lagoons, and destroying a good deal of private property. In the midst of these scenes he married his first wife, Anita, who cruised with him and animated his men by her own undaunted courage. On the Lake of Imbri his three little vessels were attacked by twenty-two belonging to Imperialists, and a desperate battle followed which resulted in Garibaldi being compelled to land his men, with their

arms and ammunition. In the last boat which left the ships were Garibaldi and his wife, who had completed the work in hand by setting fire to the little fleet of the Republic.

These circumstances are necessarily recorded in the life of a famous man, for few men have obtained eminence without rebuffs in their early career. It was on land rather than on sea that Garibaldi's name will be chronicled in history. He fought in defence of Italian liberty, and was again worsted, and passing through many stirring vicissitudes in his first efforts, escaping through woods and forests, his wife sank from exhaustion and dread, and the widowed husband with his children lapsed into a candle and soap merchant in Staten Island, where he made sufficient money to purchase a little farm in Caprera; but his thoughts were still on Italian freedom, and he offered his services to the Sardinian Government, who at first refused to accept them, but afterwards permitted him to organise a body of volunteers called "Alpine Chasseurs," consisting of 17,000 men. These he obtained from various sources, and emissaries in England enlisted thousands, who went forth to fight for Garibaldi, under the plea of "liberty and freedom." The Government of this country permitted this, but they were a poor, ragged lot who joined, taking them generally. Enthusiasm, however, for the great General Garibaldi seemed to give a forced courage to his soldiers, and this seemed to carry them through a vast campaign, and the organised soldiers fled from them as if their opponents were an inspired band, and they conquered wherever they went. Capua and Gaeta afterwards capitulated, and on his march to the former place Garibaldi met Victor Emanuel, then King of Sardinia. For several days previous his admirers had declared that Garibaldi should be Dictator of Italy. He received their suggestions with a smile, replying, "Freedom for Italy. I seek no personal honours." Advancing with Victor Emanuel, in presence of his troops, he exclaimed, "Behold your King." His words were prophetic, and a popular sovereign he remained to the day of his death, having his heritage founded by Garibaldi.

Honours thick and three-fold were afterwards offered to Garibaldi, but he preferred living in quiet seclusion in Caprera; and although his voice has been heard in Italian Debates, where he was one of the Deputies returned to the Chamber, he loved his island home, and there died, surrounded by an affectionate family, his last words being, "God bless my land!"

# A SORE TEMPTATION.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THROUGH THORNS TO ROSES," "THE MYSTERY OF ROSE COTTAGE," ETC.

## CHAPTER I.

"Oh, what is so rare as a day in June?  
Then, if ever, come perfect days;  
Then heaven tries the earth if it be in tune,  
And over it softly her warm ear lays."



**I**T was a day in June—one of those perfectly beautiful days which come to us now and then in the month of roses, as though to give us a glimpse of faultless loveliness. Not a single cloud dimmed

the azure of the sky; a soft south wind blew pleasantly in my face, fanning my hot cheeks with a gentle, caressing touch; the air was full of the fragrance of the roses and mignonette; all Nature was in perfect harmony; and even the little birds were singing joyfully in gratitude for the sun's bright rays.

And I, Marguerite Lindsay, in sight of all this beauty, flung myself disconsolately on the ground, threw my coarse straw hat impatiently at my feet, and then, away from all eyes, gave way to my sorrow, and cried as though my heart would break.

"Very wrong, very foolish," I

hear you say. I had a good home, my parents were among the notables of Nestshire, wealthy people, respected by all the county; and yet I, their youngest child, felt as if no creature upon God's beautiful earth could be so lonely, so utterly wretched as I was. And my trouble was this: I had two sisters and as many brothers. The boys were in London—busy, active men, very seldom finding time to come home: Maude and Violet were the respective darlings of my father and mother; and I, unlucky Marguerite, stood alone, an offshoot of the family-tree, which I knew quite well the said tree could very well have done without.

I was not wanted when I came into the world first; even before that event I had caused great trouble to the family. The nursery had been done away with, and a French nursery-governess engaged for my sisters. Mademoiselle had to be turned out of her schoolroom, and the good old woman who had taught Maude and Violet to walk alone imperatively recalled.

My welcome was not a rapturous one; my mother considered two girls quite enough to chaperon—my father was contented with four children; so that my venturing to open my eyes upon this stormy world at all was a mistake. The colour of those eyes was mistake number two. The Lindsays were noted for their flaxen hair and blue eyes. My mother was a handsome brunette. Alas! alas! I deviated sadly from established

rules. Before I was a year old it was a settled fact that I was no true Lindsay, and I did not even favour my mother's family—my hair was unmistakably red.

The Lindsays were a decidedly religious family. My mother had a district once upon a time—it was so long ago that no one quite remembered when, but we kept up the tradition as casting a halo of sanctity over us all; and my father held the plate in church whenever there was a charity sermon—four times a year; but in spite of these proofs of the devoutness of my parents, the sad truth remained—they had never contrived to love me.

I had been a great trouble to them all my life. A schoolroom and governess had to be kept for me long after Maude and Violet "came out." The governess left last year. She was not a bad sort of woman. I rather liked her. I think she was a sort of salve to my vanity. Miss Banks, with her withered checks, whitey-brown complexion, and scanty, corkscrew ringlets, at least would not be held up to me—like Maude and Violet—as a pleasing contrast to my own plainness. Well, Miss Banks left me last July. She kissed me, and gave me a Johnson's Dictionary, assuring me that goodness was better than beauty; and if I could never aspire to be pretty like my sisters, I might at least be useful.

I suppose I was wicked by nature. I never felt the least desire to be useful, and I always had an intense longing to be beautiful. After Miss Banks left I never did any more lessons, I drifted into a kind of aimless, desultory life. In fine weather I was nearly always out of doors; when the elements were against me I made the deserted schoolroom my headquarters. I hardly ever saw the others except at meals, not often then, for the Grange was noted for its hospitality, and as I was not "out" I was never allowed to appear in the dining-room when visitors are present.

I don't think I had ever mourned over my isolated position so bitterly as I did on that day. The great event of the county was always the Nestshire ball, which took place in July. It was the *début* of nearly all the young ladies of the county. Maude and Violet "came out" there with great *éclat* some seven years before; and though they had never yet received an offer worthy their acceptance, we all believed they would both make a grand match some day. I had heard of this Nestshire ball for years. I had looked forward to it as a sort of magician which would open to me all the pleasures and gaieties which my sisters enjoyed. Last year my governess was with us, and she persuaded mamma to

defer my "coming out," because it might interfere with my studies; but I never doubted the long-looked-for event would come off this summer. I had even decided in my own mind what I would wear, and how I would behave on the occasion.

Alas for my hopes! That day at luncheon mamma told the girls—we always called Maude and Violet "the girls"—that she meant to drive into Neston in the afternoon to order their dresses for the ball. "It is to be a grander affair than usual this year. The Earl of Ashleigh is expected home for it, so I want you to look your best." Her eyes rested with motherly pride upon her eldest daughter. Though Maude was twenty-six and Violet only a year younger, you could not find two handsomer girls in Nestshire.

Thinking it a good opportunity, I cried eagerly, "And me, too, mamma. Won't you see about my dress this afternoon?"

Maude and Violet exchanged glances of surprise and indignation at my audacity.

"You do not require a new dress, Marguerite," said my mother, severely. "I bought you a new piqué only last month."

"But for the ball!" I ventured. The tears were fast stealing into my eyes; but the thought of the pleasure of dancing with real partners to the music of a real band nerved me on. "You know, mamma, you always said you would take me to the Nestshire ball this year."

"Absurd!" muttered Violet.

"Marguerite is always thrusting herself forward," agreed Maude. These two always united together to keep me—as they said—in my proper place; unfortunately, I had no idea where that really was, I seemed to myself to have no place at all in the family interests. If I had I would try and keep in it of my own accord, without causing so much trouble to my relations generally.

My mother looked irresolute. I edged my chair the least bit nearer to her. "Do take me, mamma; I have been looking forward to it so. I am eighteen now, and Violet was only eighteen when she 'came out'; I remember it quite well, though it is seven years ago."

I made my little speech in the simplest good faith, bringing my sister's example forward as an irresistible inducement to my mother to grant my request; but before the words had well left my mouth I saw I had, though how I could not imagine, made a mistake—Maude and Violet flushed crimson; my mother looked more angry than I had ever seen her; and papa, who rarely interfered in domestic affairs, brought his hand down on the table with a bang.

"Put the idea out of your head, Selina,"

—that was mamma's name. "I positively forbid you to take that child to the ball. Her insolence is insupportable." Violet was his favourite, I knew that ; but how had I injured Violet by quoting her example as one good to follow ?

Mamma looked troubled : I don't think she quite liked breaking her promise to me. "You are very young, Marguerite," she said, not unkindly ; "you can afford to wait ; a year will soon pass by you, my dear."

I shook my head. "A year is a very long time ; oh, mamma, won't you take me?" I cried imploringly.

"Leave the room," ordered my father, testily ; "you are a perfect nuisance to us all, Marguerite."

And so I left the room, my heart beating wildly with disappointment and indignation, a great lump in my throat, and tears in my eyes. I could not stop indoors, I could not see mamma and my sisters drive off to buy the dainty ball-dresses which had been forbidden me. I caught up my old garden hat and went out, feeling sadder than I had ever done before.

"It is a beautiful world," I said reflectively, when the first storm of my passion had worn itself out, and I was sitting up, resting my head on one arm, the soft summer air fanning my cheeks. "It's a beautiful world, and a very big one ; and yet large as it is, there doesn't seem room enough in it for me. It's very hard!" I smoothed back the rebellious hair from my forehead, and began to wonder what time it was—I must have been sitting a long time under that tree. Perhaps I had better go home. In my longing for solitude I had wandered a long way. I was no longer in our own grounds, but in those of our nearest neighbour, the very Earl of Ashleigh, to whose return my mother had alluded so hopefully.

Very few people knew much about him. He was three or four and thirty, and had spent most of his life abroad, in comparative poverty—that was the account generally believed. He had no mother or sister ; and on this point every one was very exact—he was unmarried.

The Court would want a mistress—at least every one said so—and from the moment she heard of the Earl's return my mother decided in her own mind that he would marry Maude or Violet ; in age, rank, and position they would be suitable ; and he was rich enough not to need money with his wife.

We had none of us ever seen Lord Ashleigh. His uncle, the late Earl, had been a great friend of ours, but there had been

a long feud between him and his heir, and when the old man died, Ashleigh Court was shut up, and people doubted whether its new master would ever care to reside at it. As I stood there leaning against the trunk of the tree, my thoughts wandered from myself and my own troubles ; I fell to wondering what sort of man was the stranger whom my mother hoped would become her son-in-law.

"At least," I cried, speaking aloud in my excitement, "I hope he will not shut up the grounds ; I would rather he stayed away altogether than I had to give up this dear old place," and I looked at the beautifully timbered park with as much pride as if I had been its owner. I had hardly spoken when I saw a gentleman watching me from a little distance ; he held a pencil and a small book in his hand, and was evidently making a sketch. I was not surprised ; artists often came to Nestshire in the summer. I was fond of drawing myself, though as Miss Banks did not understand it I had made little progress in my favourite art. I crossed at once to the stranger's side without the least idea that I was doing anything rude or unmaidenly. "Were you sketching that oak?" I said.

He looked at me curiously, as though my words puzzled him.

"No," he answered slowly, "I do not think I was."

"Aren't you sure?" indignantly. "It is my favourite tree. In all Lord Ashleigh's grounds there is no other I like so well. I thought perhaps you admired it too, and were sketching it."

He made no offer to show me his sketch ; on the contrary, he had closed his book and put it into his pocket. He was looking at me intently. If he had been a working man I should have said he was staring. Suddenly, in deep contrition, I remembered my tear-stained cheeks, my dishevelled hair, and uncovered head, for I had left my hat underneath the tree. Of course I looked like a barbarian ; no doubt the artist took me for a villager, and wondered at my audacity in speaking to him at all. He could not guess that I was a lady and a Lindsay by my appearance.

"You come here often?" he said at last. "How is it I have never seen you here before?"

I carried the war into the enemy's country. "Do you come here often?"

"I have been two or three times this week."

"I cannot always get away ; you see it rains sometimes."

"Yes," drily, "it does."

"And mamma wants me ; at least, I

don't mean she wants me, she never does that. She sends me on errands and messages."

"Then you live about here?"

I seized upon the opportunity: little as I cared myself what he thought, for the sake of the family it was as well to inform him that I was not a common village-girl. I drew myself up to my full height—five feet two—and said gravely, "I live at the Grange."

"At the Grange! I thought an old fellow named Lindsay owned the property."

"I am that old fellow's daughter," demurred.

He laughed, he really could not help it. "I beg your pardon, ten thousand times, Miss Lindsay. I fancy I have often heard of you, but the reality differed so far from the description, that I was taken by surprise."

It was mortifying to a degree to listen to this speech. Of course he had heard of Maude and Violet; they had been described to him as the "beautiful Misses Lindsay." Well, I was not beautiful, I knew that well enough; but he need not have made it so very clear to me that he was surprised at my plainness. "Of course you are surprised," I said gravely, "but I think it was very unkind of you to say so."

"Why?" But I was in no mood to tell him. I began smoothing back my hair preparatory to a journey for its covering; the artist anticipated my wishes, he walked deliberately to the oak-tree and returned with my hat in his hand.

"I was going to suggest the advisability of some head-gear," he said, as he handed it to me. "Do you know you have run a very narrow risk of a sunstroke, Miss Lindsay?"

"Have I?"

"Yes."

"Well, it doesn't matter."

He was annoyed at my light tone. "They are very serious things; they are often fatal."

"That means they kill people."

"Sometimes."

"Well, I shouldn't have cared very much."

He started. "You ought not to say that."

"But if it is true?"

"It cannot be true."

"There's nothing I want to live for very much," I answered dejectedly. "At least there are lots of things I want to do, only they won't let me."

"Poor little girl!"

I was usually most averse to being called little, and I resented pity at all times, but

there was something in the stranger's voice and still more so in his manner of saying it that made me rather comforted than otherwise by his speech.

A distant clock struck six. I rose to go; at least, I could hardly rise, since I was standing already, but I drew myself up again, and turned round with a little bow, the poorest possible imitation of Violet's; but he turned too, and walked at my side. I was very doubtful, indeed, of the exact social position of an artist, and whether I should be injuring my family yet further than my whole existence did, by walking with one; but it was such a novelty for any one to desire to linger in my company that I could say nothing against it.

"And so this is your favourite tree?" as he passed by it. "It is a fine old fellow."

"Splendid. I like the Ashleigh grounds much better than ours."

"I have not seen yours, so I am no judge; these seem to me wonderfully grand."

"Yes; isn't it a wonder the Earl stays away from such a home?"

A strange look of sadness passed over my companion's face as he answered, "Lord Ashleigh may be the victim of circumstances, Miss Lindsay. Something stronger than his own will may keep him away from his home."

"Well, it wouldn't keep me," I answered resolutely. "To my mind Ashleigh is perfect. I would rather live there than anywhere else in the world."

"Would you?" he asked, looking at me curiously; "would you, really, Miss Lindsay? I shall not forget that."

"Yes; the Grange is pretty, but it is not like the Court. Have you been here long?" for I had a strong share of girlish curiosity.

"A few days."

"And what have you done?"

"Done!"

"Sketched. I thought artists did nothing but sketch when they came into the country. There was one young man down here last year who did a whole portfolio full of drawings in a week."

He winced as I said "young man." Perhaps he was sensitive as to his position. "I fear I shall not be so industrious."

I shook my head reprovingly. "There are lots of pretty places about here. Papa says this village is the paradise of artists. You will find plenty to do; you might even get a few orders, I daresay, people are so fond of being drawn standing at their own gates, you know."

He flushed, whether with pleasure or anger I could not make out. "Thank you,

Miss Lindsay, I dare say I shall find a fine field for my powers. If I turn my attention to rivalling the itinerant photographer, may I ask your good offices with your father? The Grange would be the first place I should wish to sketch."

" You had better begin with the Court," I said jeeringly; then he raised his hat and turned back just as he came to the boundary which separated our grounds from those of Lord Ashleigh.

As I walked slowly homewards my thoughts reverted again and again to my late companion. It was the very first time I had ever found myself talking to a stranger on terms of equality. I did not like him, I told myself, I hated him; he was rude and abrupt; he had told me frankly he was surprised at my appearance. He was probably idle, since he showed no eagerness to adopt the various fields of industry I had pointed out to him; and yet, in spite of all these faults, rudeness, indolence, and abruptness, I found myself wondering whether I should ever see him again.

Where could he be staying? There were few houses in Ashleigh; the village itself lay the other side of the Earl's grounds. He did not look like a man who would be content with very primitive lodgings. Little as I knew of the world, despite my own grave doubts as to the social position of a wandering artist, I felt quite sure that the man who had been talking to me was used to the refinements and luxuries of life, and would object to go without them.

He was a strikingly handsome man. I hardly noticed it as he stood at my side; but when I was left alone his face came back to me again and again, and I decided it was the most pleasing I had ever seen. In years he might have been thirty. He had dark, curling brown hair, and large blue eyes; but there was a shade of melancholy in their depths, and his smile had a pathos I felt but could not understand. A doubt certainly came to me that he was not happy; perhaps, like me, he found the world, large and beautiful as it was, all too little to give him what he sought or wished-for.

I was late home, but that mattered little. I generally was late, punctuality being one of the virtues Miss Banks had utterly failed to instil into me.

" Dear, dear, Miss Marguerite, and you so look hot!" was my nurse's greeting, as I entered my own room. Since my advent she had been retained in her old position. I think my mother was afraid to send her away again lest she might be once more recalled for a similar

cause. Nurse Grey was my one friend, my faithful slave and adherent. In all my eighteen years she had never crossed my will, but submitted to all my caprices with a patience for which I ought to have been grateful.

" It was so hot out," flinging myself into the first chair I came to. " Nurse," remembering my wrong, " do you know mamma won't take me to the ball after all? She said so to-day at lunch. Isn't it a shame?"

Nurse hesitated; to openly blame my mother was a little more than she could venture on. " Do you mind very much, my pet?"

" Mind? Of course I do," disconsolately.

" Your day'll come soon, Miss Marguerite. When the young ladies are married, and you're the only daughter at home, things will be very different, take my word for it."

" But when *will* they marry?" anxiously. " Maude was twenty-six the other day. If I am never to have any pleasure while she and Violet are at home, I do think they ought to be quick and marry some one."

" Well, perhaps they will, dear. Lord Ashleigh's come home, I hear; the mistress told me to-day that he was expected."

" Poor Lord Ashleigh!" I cried, with youthful sarcasm. " Even he can't rid us of all our difficulties, nurse. Even if he marries one of my sisters, I'm afraid he can't take pity on both."

" Pity, indeed, Miss Marguerite! and they the most popular young ladies in Neston!"

" I wish they were not quite so popular. Other girls not half so much talked-of marry. Maude and Violet just go on waiting for some one very grand who never comes."

" What will you wear to-night, Miss Marguerite?"

" Anything, it doesn't matter."

Nurse, however, thought it did. She picked out a thin coloured muslin, fastened my sash with great care, smoothed a few rebellious locks off my forehead, and announced to me that I was " ready." " Tidy for once, Miss Marguerite, but how long you'll keep so there's no telling."

## CHAPTER II.

" And the heart that is soonest awake to the flowers

Is always the first to be touched by the thorns."

Twas part of the family system of keeping me in perpetual childhood that whenever no guests were present I was always expected to appear at

dessert. I had oftentimes rebelled against this custom, but in vain ; so soon as the wine and fruit were placed upon the table, a footman duly warned me of the fact, held open the dining-room door for me with great ceremony ; and then followed the spectacle of my consuming a bunch of raisins or half an orange in stiff discomfort.

That night I was late, hopelessly late ; the footman made two journeys in vain, and then gave it up as a bad job. I got to the drawing-room precisely at the moment when my mother and sisters returned to it. I felt a little doubtful as to my reception, and ensconced myself in the corner of a distant sofa ; but I need not have been alarmed—they were discussing a topic so all-engrossing that I doubted if they even perceived my arrival.

"And so it really is true ?" Violet spoke, and fanned herself with languid grace, just a trifle more interest in her voice than was often heard there.

"Perfectly true," replied my mother. "I met old Lady Nugent whilst we were at Smuth's, and she had seen him."

"Seen him!" echoed my sisters, in different tones. "Seen the Earl ! You did not tell us that before, mamma."

"You have hardly given me time to tell you anything. It seems he knew Captain Nugent abroad, and so he called on Lady Nugent directly he arrived at the Court."

I pricked my ears at this ; if anything could make me feel more disconsolate it would be exclusion from the Ashleigh grounds, where I had spent so many happy hours.

"And what is he like?"

"Lady Nugent says he is strikingly handsome, but all the Ashleighs are that. I don't suppose the Court has ever had an ugly master."

"Wasn't there some strange story about him?" asked Violet, lowering her voice almost to a whisper.

"Mamma, do tell us why the old Earl quarrelled with him," said Maude, in her most coaxing manner, her hand on my mother's shoulder. Within a stone's throw of them I was as completely forgotten as though I were not in the house. I was tolerably used to this state of things, but I felt a strange, unaccountable interest in the master of the Court, and so, with no thought of eavesdropping, I craned my neck forward, and listened as attentively as my sisters to my mother's story.

"It was some love-affair," and from the very tone of her voice I felt the subject was distasteful to her. "News came that Mr. Lisle was going to marry a beautiful

opera-singer, and the old Earl was infuriated. He wrote at once, and threatened to cut him off with a shilling if he persisted in his folly."

"But *could* he?" asked Violet, curiously. "I always thought the Court was entailed."

"It was absolutely in the Earl's power to leave it as he would. He swore a solemn oath that no opera-singer should be mistress of his house."

"And did Mr. Lisle marry her?"

My mother shook her head. "No one quite knew that. She disappeared. She occupied a very humble position at the theatre—sang in a chorus, or something of that kind. She disappeared from Paris, and no trace of her was ever discovered. Lord Ashleigh would gladly have welcomed his nephew to the Court in those days, but Mr. Lisle was proud, and replied that he would never willingly look upon his uncle's face again."

"He must be a very revengeful man."

"He was young then"—with a readiness to excuse his faults she never showed towards her own youngest child—"young and heedless. The old Earl took his refusal very much to heart; but when he died it was discovered he had done Mr. Lisle more than justice ; he left him not only the Court and its revenues, but every single thing of which he died possessed."

"How glad Lord Ashleigh must be he did not marry the opera-singer."

"Probably. Why he stayed 'away' so long is a problem which has puzzled every one ; but that is set at rest. He is now at the Court, and he told Lady Nugent his one hope and desire was to settle down there."

"It will be charming to have the Court occupied, mamma : why, we shall be Lord Ashleigh's nearest neighbours."

"Yes, I shall ask your papa to call on him to-morrow ; he might invite him to dinner or something. It would be very nice if we could get to know him really before the ball."

"I hope he is not a melancholy, aesthetic young man," said Maude, dolefully.

"Whatever he is, he has fifty thousand pounds a year, and his wife will be the first lady in Blankshire," returned Violet. "Otherwise we should not trouble our heads about him. I am glad you told us his romance, mamma. Maudie, we had better steer clear of operas and actresses in our conversation."

It was strange how what I had heard was impressed upon my memory. I could not get Lord Ashleigh's story out of my head. It seemed to me the saddest I had ever heard. He had loved a beautiful singer-

and lost her. No wonder he stayed away from his home, and wandered aimlessly in foreign lands. I should have expected him quite to hate Ashleigh, since it came to him too late to be shared with her ; and it was in her place my mother wished him to set Maude or Violet.

I looked at my sisters, and without any disparagement of their charms, I decided in my own mind that theirs were not the faces to comfort a man whose first romance had ended so mournfully.

Thinking of Ashleigh's master reminded me of my afternoon's companion. A bright idea came to me ; perhaps he was staying at the Court as the Earl's guest. I gathered from my mother's words that Lord Ashleigh was fond of artistic pursuits. What more natural than that the friend he brought with him to his grand old home should be an artist ? That would explain the strangely aristocratic bearing of my unknown acquaintance, and the slighting coldness with which he received my well-meant suggestion of patronage from the local magnates. As the Earl's friend and guest there was no necessity for him to toil over his easel like some of the artists who flocked to Neston in the summer.

Things never happen quite as they are planned. My father called at the Court the following day. The whole family anxiously awaited his return. I believe my mother and the girls had a vague idea that in a fit of sudden friendliness the Earl might come back with his neighbour to an informal dinner. If so, they were grievously disappointed. My father had found Lord Ashleigh from home, and so we were no nearer acquaintance with the lion of the neighbourhood.

"He will return your call to-morrow," decided my mother. "Such a stranger in the neighbourhood, he will be only too anxious to form friends."

"A man with fifty thousand pounds a-year won't find it difficult to form friends, Selina," replied my father, a little crossly. He was decidedly put out ; he hated paying morning calls. Indeed, it was a boast of his that he never made them. To have crossed both his wishes and his profession, and to no avail, was enough to rouse a far better temper than the one enjoyed by Colonel Lindsay of the Grange.

A strange atmosphere of discomfort pervaded our house the next day. My father retired to the library, disdaining to share the anxiety evinced by his wife and daughters. My mother seated herself down to a quiet afternoon in the drawing-room ; my sisters, in the prettiest forget-me-not costumes, kept her com-

pany ; and I bethought myself that the June sunshine was calling me out of doors, and I could nowhere find a pleasanter shelter than beneath my favourite oak-tree.

"It is Lord Ashleigh's tree," I thought to myself ; "but then he can't mind my sitting under it. I wonder if he will come this afternoon ? I think if I see his friend I will give him a little hint how anxious the girls are to see him. No one will be in a good temper now until he has been. I wish he had never come home. Nothing has gone smoothly since the day we heard he had come"—for I had not recovered from my disappointment yet. At eighteen is an important pleasure, and one does not lightly forget losing it.

I put on my garden hat and started. It never once occurred to me that it was not right of me to go where I might meet a stranger unknown to my parents. I had no idea that my brief conversation with the artist could have in it anything clandestine or wrong.

He was not there ! Not until I reached the oak-tree did I realise how entirely I had expected to see him. The sun shone just as brightly, the air was as pleasant, the song of the birds sounded quite as joyously as it had done two days before ; and yet to me there seemed a strange blank over everything, a sense of something wanting. I felt lonely and disappointed as I sat down in my favourite spot.

"Perhaps he has gone back to London." But I hoped he had not, the music of his voice, the grave, thoughtful expression of his blue eyes, had impressed me strangely, I could not have told why, but I felt that if he had indeed gone away I should be grieved. He was the only person I had ever met who had in a measure belonged to me alone, and was not the property of my sisters, constrained to look on me with a contemptuous forbearance for their sake.

"And so you have come again ?" He had walked to my side, so suddenly that I had never heard his footsteps on the soft greensward. I looked up and saw his dark blue eyes watching me intently. I felt a hot flush dye my cheek. Somehow I could not bear that keen scrutiny unmoved.

"Have you come to finish your sketch ?" I said, when I had recovered myself somewhat.

"I have finished it."

"Perhaps you came here yesterday."

"I did ; but I could not find the subject of my sketch, and so I had to finish it from memory."

"Which tree was it ? Did you lose your way ?"

"I did not lose my way."

"I should like to see it."

"Really?"

"Yes; I meant to have asked you to let me see it on Monday, only——"

"Only what?"

But I hid my face in my hands.

"Come," he said gently, "bargain for bargain. I will show you my sketch if you will tell me why you did not ask to see it."

"I was cross," humbly. "I think I felt annoyed that you did not offer to show it me."

"I was very rude; but I thought you might be offended," he said, a little hurriedly.

"Offended! I!"

"Look here." He took a drawing from his pocket and placed it in my hands. It was a spirited sketch, and even I could recognise its subject at a glance. It was my own face which looked at me from the paper; my face under its mass of tangled hair, and tear-stained. He had sketched as I had thrown myself on the ground in my childish agony of grief. A moment's delay and I tore the paper in a thousand pieces, I stamped on the fragments as though they had done me an injury. He watched me with a strangely thoughtful air.

"Hadn't you better punish me instead of that poor piece of paper? *that*, at least, has done you no harm."

But I was too indignant to hear reason. "It was cruel of you," I sobbed, "to take advantage of me like that. I thought I was alone, and I was so miserable, I felt so wretched, that I came out here to be alone with my misery."

His voice sounded as agitated as my own. "And do you think it cost me nothing to see your grief? At your age you ought not to have a trouble in the world, and——"

"And I have pecks," confidentially, my anger beginning to abate; "in fact, whole cartloads."

"Don't you think you had better forgive me?"

"I never forgive people who laugh at me."

He looked surprised. "Laugh at you! Miss Lindsay, that is a false accusation. I felt nothing but sorrow. My one regret was that I had no right to comfort you. When you spoke to me it cost me an effort not to mention my sympathy with your grief—a hard effort, truly."

"You need not remind me that I spoke to you before you did to me," I exclaimed pettishly. "I know it was very wrong,

but I am always doing wrong things. Maude and Violet always do the right ones."

"Do they?"

"Yes."

"What prosy people they must be!"

"Why?"

He smiled, and taking up one of my hands, began playing with it gently. "If they are so perfect themselves they can have no sympathy with other people's little shortcomings."

"They have none with mine."

"You speak as if you had a heavy weight of sins on your conscience, child," laughing.

"I have. I am one long mistake; every one says so."

"Very kind of every one."

"Why, even you said so."

"Indeed I did not."

"You said you had heard of the Misses Lindsay, and I was not like what you had expected."

"Neither were you," drily. "I had heard of them; for a good many years in my life their names were familiar to me as household words."

"How very odd!"

"Very."

"And did you ever see them?"

"Never; but I believe I am to have that honour."

"Perhaps your friend, Lord Ashleigh, will bring you to the Grange," I suggested sagely.

"Perhaps. How did you guess he was my friend?"

"Because he has just come home, and you seem to be staying at the Court. Is he a friend of yours?"

"I hardly know."

"You must know," decidedly.

"I have seen a great deal of him. We have been intimately acquainted for more than thirty years, I suppose."

"Really! Why I shouldn't have thought it. Why, then you must be thirty years old."

"Thirty-four, at your service."

"Thirty-four!"

"Do you think it very old? Have I become a sort of modern Methusalah in your eyes?" a little offendedly.

"Oh, dear no! You are not nearly so old as papa. He is fifty-one."

"Really! Well, there is a great difference between fifty-one and thirty-four, you admit that, though you do think the latter a great age."

"Well, you know, it seems so to me," candidly; "if you were two years older you would be just twice as old as I am."

"Really! What an interesting calculation." But he did not seem pleased at it.

"It is getting late," I said suddenly, "I must be going home."

"Stay a little longer," authoritatively. "I want to talk to you. You don't dine before six o'clock, surely?"

"I never dine at all."

"Never dine at all! Do you mean that they starve you?"

"Oh, no; but I dine early."

"In the nursery?"

"We haven't got a nursery," gravely.

"Then when Colonel Lindsay invites me to dinner, I shall not have the pleasure of meeting you?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then I don't think I shall come."

"You are making very sure of being invited," just a little annoyed at his taking it for granted.

"Well, a little bird whispered to me that Colonel Lindsay was going to invite Ashleigh to dinner at the Grange one evening next week."

"But you are not Lord Ashleigh."

"The Earl never goes anywhere without me."

"How very fond he must be of you."

"He is devoted to me."

"If you are so inseparable, where is Lord Ashleigh now?" I asked suddenly.

His brow clouded. "Do you want to see him?"

"Not at all," tersely. "I expect he'll be odious; besides, if he marries Violet I shall be sure to see plenty of him."

"Marries Violet!" in genuine surprise. "What can you be thinking of? He has never seen her."

"But mother has settled it all. I heard her talking to the girls last night. Lord Ashleigh has fifty thousand pounds a year, and he wants a wife."

"I never heard that he did," put in the artist, in a mischievous aside.

"There is a very strange story about him; but mamma says he is so rich, that won't matter; and he is to marry either Maude or Violet; but we all think it will be Vi."

"Poor Lord Ashleigh! You seem to have settled his fate for him very nicely."

"Don't tell him."

"Why?"

"Perhaps he would be angry."

The blue eyes softened strangely; the artist laid one hand upon my shoulder, his voice was full of tenderness. "I can promise you one thing, little girl. Lord Ashleigh will never be angry with you, of that you may be very sure," and with those words we said good-bye and parted..

### CHAPTER III.

"For there's nothing half so sweet in life  
As love's young dream."

FROM that day forward my life changed; a sudden flood of sunshine seemed to have rushed into it. Without act or deed of mine a new happiness had crept into my life, changing me from a lonely, neglected child into a bright, hopeful girl. I cannot tell you how it was; we never made an appointment, we never planned a meeting; and yet it came about that nearly every day I saw Lord Ashleigh's friend. Apparently he purposed making a long stay at the Court, for he never hinted at his departure; the Earl did not seem to make heavy demands upon his time, for nearly every afternoon when I walked into the Ashleigh grounds I found him waiting for me by the grand old tree which had become our trysting-place.

My family never appeared to notice my frequent wanderings. I was so thoroughly one apart that my doings had never troubled them much; and just now all their thoughts were busy with the new master of the Court and in preparations for the Neston ball. Oddly enough, Lord Ashleigh had never seen my sisters. Twice had the Earl called at the Grange, only to hear that the ladies were out; and when my father, in duty's stern pathway, had presented himself a second time at the Court, he was greeted with the news that Lord Ashleigh had gone to London. It was very strange. My mother talked of little else; it was very well for her to feel certain Violet was fitted to make the Earl happy; if Lord Ashleigh were to share her opinion he must first make Violet's acquaintance — that was an indispensable prelude.

And so blindly, madly, carelessly, recking little of the dangers that beset me, the perils of my pathway, I walked on to my fate. Living at home with parents and elder sisters to take care of me, I was yet to all intents and purposes as lonely and neglected as the poorest work-girl in London. And so the June roses faded, the later blossoms of July had opened, and we were within a week of the Neston ball, when one day, standing beneath our spreading oak, I raised my eyes to the artist's, and asked him if he did not think it very strange how signally Lord Ashleigh and my father missed each other in all the visits they had exchanged.

"Very strange." One of his arms was round my waist, and he had drawn me very close to himself. Three weeks ago we had

been strangers ; now he had taught me not to shrink away from his touch, and to feel my heart beat quicker at the mere sound of his voice.

"It almost seems as if he did not wish to know us."

"Perhaps he is afraid of Violet," laughing.

"Well, it is very foolish of him ; he must see her some time in a place like this, where every one knows every one."

"Well, then, he desires to stave off the evil day. Marguerite, there is a troubled look in your eyes to-day ; you are like the little girl I found crying under an oak-tree just three weeks ago. What is the matter ?" But I had no mind to tell him, I bent my eyes upon the ground, and kept an obstinate silence.

Mr. Travers (his name was Bertram Travers, and I thought it the sweetest I had ever heard) raised my face gently until he could look into my eyes. "I am waiting for your answer, Marguerite." There was a touch of authority in his voice, as though already he had a right to my confidence.

"I cannot tell you, indeed I cannot."

"You shall tell me before I leave you," and there was no mistaking the resolution of his manner. "Some one has been vexing you, and I mean to know all about it."

I never thought of contesting his will any further. Drooping my eyes so that they should not meet his gaze, I said, hurriedly, "It was only that I had been thinking."

"Thinking ought not to make you cry. Whom were you thinking about?"

"You."

The hand that held mine tightened its grasp. "And what did you think of me, Marguerite."

"It is three weeks to-day since I saw you. You cannot stay with Lord Ashleigh always. Visits don't often last much longer than three weeks. I was thinking that very soon you would be going away."

"Going away ! Should you be sorry ?"

It never dawned on me that I was doing anything wrong or unmaidenly, I only knew that in all the wide world he was the only friend I had, the only creature who spoke kindly to me. The hot tears chased each other down my cheeks, my chest heaved with sobs ; I could not bear the idea of his leaving me to the dreary loneliness which had been my fate before I met him that beautiful bright June day.

"Would you be sorry ?" he repeated.

"Of course I should," I answered from my sobs ; "you are the only person who is kind to me."

For all answer he threw his arms round me and pressed me to his heart. I never thought of resisting the embrace ; as my head fell upon his shoulder it seemed to me that it had found its true resting-place at last. "I will never leave you, Marguerite, whilst you bid me stay. Look up, my darling, and answer me—will you give yourself to me and let me take care of you for ever ?" But I was perfectly satisfied with his promise that he would never leave me, I wanted nothing more—the doubt that had tortured me was set at rest.

"Well," he said tenderly, "aren't you going to answer me ? You have told me again and again that you are not happy at the Grange. Would you leave it and give yourself to me ? I promise you, my darling, that no sorrow human love can guard against shall ever touch you. The one desire of my life shall be to make yours a dream of happiness."

Happiness ! ah, it would be happiness to leave the cold, constrained home-life, where I ever seemed an intruder ; but yet I hesitated. Little as I knew of proprieties I doubted if my father would consent to my making a present of myself to a stranger. "I couldn't, you know," I said awkwardly. "I really couldn't ; papa would never let me."

"Why not ?"

"He does not care for me," I confessed humbly enough ; "indeed, he often says he wishes I had not been born, but—"

"Amiable old gentleman !" sarcastically. "Well, go on, Marguerite—but—"

"I don't think he would like to get rid of me like that. It is only very poor people who give their children up to strangers, and—"

"The richest people in the land yield their daughters to husbands," said Mr. Travers, with a strange twinkle in his eyes. "Marguerite, what an utter child you are ! Dear, don't you understand I am asking you to be my wife, the partner of my life ?"

"Your wife !" aghast. "Do you really mean it ?"

"Of course I mean it. Is it such a very terrible idea ?" a little injuredly.

"But you are thirty-four," gravely. "You must have been ever so old when I was born."

"There are sixteen years between us. I own it is a great difference, but not too great, I think, for love to bridge it over."

"But I can't be married," I protested. "I have not even 'come out' yet. I shouldn't know in the least how to keep house. Oh, no, it would never do at all."

At first I thought he was angry with me, his eyes darkened so and his hand clasped

mine so tightly that I almost cried out with the pain. At last he turned to me and said gently, "Are those your only objections, Marguerite?"

"I don't know. I don't understand what you mean. Don't hold my hand so tight, you hurt me terribly."

He released the hand at once, he unfolded the arms that had been clasped around me, and stood leaning against the tree in silent displeasure. I could not bear the look on his face, and threw myself on the ground at his feet.

"Don't be angry with me," I pleaded tearfully. "You know quite well that I like you better than any one else in the world, and you almost break my heart when you look like that. You do indeed, Bertie—"

He had taught me to use his name, but I very rarely did so. I fancied the sound of it would move him now, and it did ; he looked down upon me with a strangely tender expression in his dark eyes.

"You like me better than any one else in the world, and yet you will not marry me?" he said gravely. "How am I to believe in your affection, Marguerite?"

"I don't want to marry any one," I answered, with great emphasis. "If I did I would marry you to-morrow ; but it would be a very sad thing for you if I did. I am always making mistakes. Ask mamma and the girls, they will tell you I am simply unbearable."

"And if I choose to prefer a simply unbearable wife, isn't that my concern, Marguerite?" he asked gently. "What has given you such a strong aversion to the very idea of being married?"

I paused to give the subject the deep consideration it seemed to demand. "I suppose because all the married people I know are so unhappy."

"Your experience has been unfortunate."

"It is true; papa is always scolding mamma, she looks quite a different creature when he goes away for a day or two ; and then you see I am only eighteen, and I'm afraid I don't know anything very well. I have run wild ever since Miss Eanks—she was my governess, you know—went away ; and I was pretty wild before, she used to say. I think to sit up in the drawing-room in a silk dress and do nothing but order dinner and have people to call on would kill me. I should feel stifled. I know I couldn't breathe."

He looked at me a moment doubtfully, then he put out his arm and drew me to himself again. "If you love me, Marguerite, nothing else matters. I will pro-

mise never to scold you as long as I live, and as for the morning calls, we need not pay any unless you like. Dear, I think I can make you happy if only you will let me try."

I felt happy then—felt as if I had found my true home at last, but my pride made one last effort to assert itself. "Are you quite sure it isn't pity," I asked in a kind of choked voice, "because I was so very miserable the day you saw me first? I shouldn't like to be married out of pity."

"You need not be afraid of that?"

"And you will forget how wretched I looked that afternoon? you had no right to look at me, you know, when I thought I was all alone with my sorrow."

"I cannot promise to forget," he answered, and to my surprise his voice sounded almost as husky as my own. "When I saw you them alone in your sorrow, your sweet face stained with tears, I made up my mind that, Heaven aiding me, you should one day become my wife."

"Really! I looked dreadfully untidy."

"You looked—" he stopped. "I shall not tell you what; I don't want to spoil your simplicity, my darling. Well, then," in another tone, "you are to be my wife; and having settled that question another occurs. When shall I speak to Colonel Lindsay?"

But my hands were extended in supplication. "Never! Oh, Bertie, he will be so angry!"

"Why?" coolly. "He can't expect everyone else to be so blind to your sweetness as he seems to contrive to be, somehow or other, himself."

"But he will be so surprised."

"Possibly! I will break it to him gently, Marguerite, you need not be alarmed."

"He will be so angry; he will never let me be married before Maude and Violet."

Bertram smiled. "Unless those young ladies are married very shortly I expect he will have to give way. I do not mean to wait long for my wife, I can tell you."

I said nothing, I was thinking of papa and mamma, and the storm which would break out when they heard of my extraordinary secret.

"I shall call on Colonel Lindsay tomorrow."

"Please don't."

"My dear," he said gravely ; "you forget he is your father; he may not have been a very tender one, but it is certainly his right to be consulted as to your future. I do not believe for one moment that he will refuse his consent; but it is my place to ask for it."

Visions of papa and Bertram in solemn

conclave in the library distressed my peace of mind. I could not bear the thought of it. "If you would only wait until he has seen Lord Ashleigh," I pleaded; "please to, Bertie."

"What has that to do with it?"

"He would not be quite so cross. Papa never is really in a good temper; but, still, he is seldom quite so dreadful as he has been these three weeks."

"But if Lord Ashleigh is invisible to your father, and he really seems to be?"

"He must see him at the ball."

"I am not sure of that."

"Please wait till after the ball," I urged eagerly; "they are all so busy getting ready for it, and they won't have time to think of me until afterwards."

"Poor little Marguerite!" thoughtfully—"of less importance to the family than a new ball-dress. I wonder, child, they have not spoilt your temper long ago by unkindness and neglect."

"Then you will wait?"

"I suppose I must," ruefully. "I don't like it; but the fact is, Marguerite, I cannot refuse you."

My hand glided into his in silent gratitude, but I was almost alarmed when I perceived the effect of this action. Bertram took me in his arms and kissed me passionately again and again; there was something in that caress which seemed to seal my life's destiny—the very touch of his lips seemed to say "You are mine, I will never let you go."

"The mistress wants you, Miss Marguerite." It was Nurse Grey who delivered this message to me directly I reached home. The dear old woman was standing at the side-door awaiting my approach, a troubled look on her kindly face. I tossed off my hat and prepared to go to my mother.

"You'd better go upstairs, dear, and let me smooth your hair and tidy you up a bit," suggested nurse kindly. "Don't be in too great a hurry, missie."

"Is there anything the matter, nurse?" for nurse was arraying me in my most becoming dress, and plaiting my hair with deliberate care. Could the kind old servant be striving to make me look my best with a view of disarming my mother's anger?

"I am afraid so, Miss Marguerite."

An awful fear filled my heart; neglect and disdain I was used to, but not to outbursts of anger. We had wonderfully few what are called "scenes" at home, and after that meeting by the old oak, and all

the excitement it caused me, I felt really incapable of bearing more agitation.

"What is the matter, nurse?" I asked faintly; "I am sure something is wrong. Do tell me what it is? It will trouble me less if I am not quite taken by surprise."

"I can't explain it all to you, missie, for I don't rightly know myself. Mrs. Lester has been here, and I think she must have been saying something about you, for the moment she had gone the mistress came up here almost white with rage, and asked where you were."

"And what did you tell her, nurse?"

"What could I say, dear, but that you had gone out directly after dinner? I never saw the mistress so put out, and she said I ought to have gone with you. I up and told her that you walked for miles and miles sometimes, and my old bones were too stiff to be running after you. She didn't say no more then, except that I was to send you to her directly you came in."

I took a hurried look at myself in the glass, and I had to confess that the sight did not reassure me. I was pale as death, the faint colour that sometimes relieved the creamy tint of my complexion had vanished, my eyes were red and discoloured under the many tears I had shed, and altogether I decided quickly that I was looking my worst instead of my best, and with this trying consciousness I made my way to the drawing-room.

It was within a few minutes of dinner-time, and the whole family were gathered there in their evening toilettes. I felt like a criminal at the bar as I advanced tremblingly towards the group, trying hard to put on a confidence I was far from possessing.

"What have you to say for yourself, Marguerite?" thundered my father. "How can you defend your disgraceful conduct?"

"She was born to be a disgrace to us!"

"A perfect nuisance!"

These kindly remarks came from my sisters; mother alone said nothing. She was very angry, I could see that from her face, but at present she said nothing, and contented herself with looking at me in silent scrutiny.

"What is the matter?"—it was my own voice; it sounded so weak and thin, so full of fear that I hardly recognised it.

"The matter! can you ask? Wretched girl! your deceitful conduct has been found out. We know everything!"

I felt my white face grow crimson. If any confirmation of my guilt were needed it was surely given by my change of colour.

"See, she cannot deny it!"

"She has shame enough to blush!"

"I am not at all ashamed!" I cried passionately; "I have done nothing to blush for, and I do not in the least understand what you are all talking about."

"Listen to her!" thundered papa.

"Shameful!"

"Shocking!"

Mother was roused at this; she did not love me as she loved the others, but still I was her own child, and she would not suffer me to be condemned quite unheard.

"Mrs. Lester has been here, Marguerite."

"Has she, mamma? I don't quite see what that has to do with me? I can't bear Mrs. Lester, I am rather glad I was out."

"Can you remember the last time you saw her?" asked my mother, gravely.

I thought a moment, and then I recollect ed that a few days ago, as I was walking through the Ashleigh grounds at Bertram's side, we met Mrs. Lester face to face. I understood now what had happened; this lady was the greatest gossip of the neighbourhood, she must have come to the Grange purposely to have told my parents of the "goings on" of their youngest child.

"I think it was last Monday I met her in the fields—yes, it was Monday, I am sure."

"You do not deny it, then? She was not mistaken in thinking it was you."

"Oh, dear no," I nodded to her.

"Marguerite," mother's voice had an anguish in it I could not understand, "who was with you? You were not alone, she says?"

"Mr. Travers was with me." The readiness of my reply for one instant alarmed them, then they returned to the charge in angry chorus.

"And who is he?"

"Do you think it right or proper for a girl of your age to wander about with any common stranger she may meet?"

"He is an artist." For some reason unknown to myself, I made my replies as short as possible, and put into them as little information as I could.

"How long have you known him?"

"Three weeks."

"Indeed! How often have you met?"

"I don't know."

"You ~~must~~ know, girl."

"I don't really, papa. I never counted, I think I have seen him every day since, except the day you first called on Lord Ashleigh—I was at home all the afternoon then."

"The fellow ought to be ashamed of himself, deluding a child like you."

"He is not a fellow," indignantly; "and he has not deluded me."

"Marguerite," asked my mother, in a gentler tone—she knew me better than the others did, and had learned that harshness only hardened me—"what made you listen to this gentleman? How could you let him make acquaintance with you."

"I think I made it with him. I spoke first. He is so nice, mother; you would like him very much, I am sure."

Mother threw up her hands in dismay; the girls tossed their heads in great disdain, papa proceeded to pass sentence on me. "You will never see him again."

"I must," I cried passionately. "I must see him; he is the only friend I have in the world"—and then I buried my face in my hands and sobbed bitterly. My tears were of no avail, papa would not withdraw his verdict. Until I gave my word of honour to hold no communication with the artist, or he was safely frightened off the neighbourhood, I was to be a species of State prisoner. By day I was never to be left alone, at night I was to be locked into my own room. Mother suggested that this course of treatment might break my spirit, but papa told her that he did not care, he would be master in his own house, and he would teach idle tramps of artists not to kill time by flirting with his daughters; and then he conducted me upstairs to my own room, and without one word of kindness or forgiveness saw me safely inside it.

#### CHAPTER IV.

"And there is even a happiness  
That makes the heart afraid."

 AWOKE the next day with a strange sensation that something had happened. I put my hand to my aching head, and tried, in vain to recall my thoughts. Only too soon memory came back to me. The afternoon before, Bertram had asked me to be his wife, and through Mrs. Lester's tale-bearing the family anger was turned upon me. I was a species of State prisoner, unable to leave the house.

I had no idea of the time, I felt tired and unsettled; but yet it must have been far past my usual hour of rising, for there was a noise of stir and life below stairs. In vain I tried to think. I knew my parents too well to persuade myself that they would change their determination; and what would Bertram imagine had become of me? He would wait and watch in vain for me at the trysting-place. Perhaps in

time he would believe me faithless. This thought was torture ; the hot tears rushed unbidden into my eyes, and I laid my aching head wearily upon the pillows, thinking that in spite of all its beauty this world was a very hard, cold place, and full of troubles.

So my dear old nurse found me when she came gently in with a tray of breakfast. The good old woman was in a state of high indignation, I could see it by the very toss of her head. From my babyhood she had made me her own special charge, and an unkindness to me was always one to her.

"Miss Marguerite, my lamb, I have brought you up your breakfast."

"I don't think I can eat anything, thank you, nurse," I said dejectedly, without opening my eyes.

"But you must, my dear ; you had no supper last night, nor tea either, more shame to some people !" This last remark might have been meant to apply to my parents or Mrs. Lester. I saw the poor old woman would be really hurt at my refusal, and so I roused myself and tried to partake of the delicacies she had provided.

"How did you get in, nurse ? I thought the door was locked."

"I went to the Colonel myself, dear, and told him never a bit of breakfast could I eat until I knew my child was having hers. I've been in once or twice before, Miss Marguerite, but you were asleep—sound asleep, too ; and yet, to look at you now, one would think you'd been awake the live-long night."

"Do you know what they said to me last night, nurse ?" I asked presently, curiously.

"I can guess, Miss Marguerite. Jane heard the young ladies talking about it last night."

"I wonder if I am very wicked, nurse ?" I asked sorrowfully. "Every one seems to think if I do a thing it must be wrong. What harm can there be in walking along with a—a friend ?" the pause being because I really did not know how to describe Bertram's connection with myself.

Nurse looked grave ; she had old-fashioned ideas of what was prudent and proper ; but she was not in any mood to blame me. "I think, Miss Marguerite, that if a young lady's kept that strict at home, and sees no pleasure in the house, her family can't say much if she seeks a little out of doors."

"And he is so nice," I whispered. "Oh, nurse, I am sure you would be delighted with him."

Nurse sighed ; things had evidently gone

further than she imagined. "You're young, my dear," she said fondly, "and careless. I should have thought more of the gentleman if he had come direct to your papa. The Colonel's not an unjust man to strangers, though his temper be a bit cantankerous."

"He is coming," I retorted petulantly. "I dare say he would have come to-day only I asked him to wait until after the ball next week."

Nurse opened her eyes in wonder. "And you are really going to marry him, Miss Marguerite ?" smoothing back my hair gently with one finger.

"I don't want to be married, nurse, the least in the world ; only I suppose I shall have to be, I can't belong to him without."

"You're very young, Miss Marguerite."

"But he isn't, nurse, he's quite old."

"That'll be a sorry sight, you tied to an old man, my dear. Hadn't you better think twice ?"

"I can't think any more," I cried crossly. "I am quite sure I mean to marry him if he wishes it ; only papa says I am not to go out any more by myself, and Bertie may think I am dead, or that I have forgotten all about him. I shouldn't wonder if he went away and married someone else, and then I should go into a decline or drown myself."

The frightful picture thus conjured up moved nurse as nothing else would have done. From that moment she was on my side heart and soul. If she had wavered a little through fear of my father before, her whole allegiance was mine then. "You might write to him, Miss Marguerite," she suggested quickly.

Odd as it may seem, I had never thought of this. For a moment I brightened up ; then my dejection returned. "I haven't any writing-paper, nurse ; and even if I had I could never get a letter posted. If I put a letter in the bag directed to Mr. Travers, papa would stop it."

"He is staying at the Court, Miss Marguerite ?"

"Yes."

"Then, my deary, just you write your letter and I'll see that it gets to him. I can't walk to the Court myself, but the village post-office isn't beyond even my old legs. Once your letter's in there your papa himself can't meddle with it."

She brought me a sheet of paper and an envelope, a penny bottle of ink, and a pen. The latter was rusty, the ink pale and watery, the stationery of the humblest description, for nurse was not a great correspondent ; but I seized on the things

as if they had been the most precious of their kind, and so they were to me, for they would open a way to the only being who truly loved me.

It was the first letter I had ever written in my life, for no one had hitherto expressed a wish to hear from me; and like the Pharisees of old, I was one of those who only "love those who love them." Never a thought of the strangeness of my action came to me; my only fear was that we might be interrupted; and I wrote on in desperate haste, never pausing to arrange my thoughts, so that the result was somewhat perplexing:—

"DEAR BERTIE,—I am very wretched. Papa says I am never to go out any more, so I shall never see you again unless you come here. I wish you would, only I am sure he would never see you. Perhaps you had better forget all about me. I think it would be happier for you, and I dare say I should die. I don't feel as if I should ever be happy again."

MARGUERITE."

I folded my letter and addressed it with great care to "Bertram Travers, Esq., care of Lord Ashleigh, The Court, Ashleigh, near Neston." The envelope was so small, and the direction so long that I had an effort to get it all in, but it was achieved at last, and with a sigh of relief I slipped it into nurse's hand.

Mother came in when nurse had gone, and while I was still at my toilet. Her face was gentler than usual, and she even kissed me on my forehead. "I want you to come downstairs with me as soon as you are dressed," she said.

"I would much rather not," I answered.

"I am not going to scold you," she said kindly. "I think, Marguerite, we have left you too much to yourself. I had forgotten you were no longer a child. If you will promise me never to meet Mr. Travers without my knowledge I shall be quite satisfied."

I shook my head. "I cannot promise you that, mamma."

"It is very shocking to think that a stranger should have so much influence over you," she answered, with a sigh. "Think, my dear, you are only eighteen; we must know a great deal better what is good for you than you can do."

"I don't want to be good, mamma; I had far rather be happy," I cried passionately.

To my surprise she did not reprove me; the tears started in her own eyes as she said, "There is very little happiness in this world, Marguerite—very little."

"But I have never been happy at all. You were happy once, mamma, weren't you—before you met papa?"

She blushed crimson; perhaps in that far-off time she loved some one as Bertie loved me, and her parents separated them, and made her accept papa, because of his grand old home and large fortune. Well, they might separate me from Bertie, but of one thing I was resolved—no one should ever make me marry any one like papa.

When I was ready, mother took me downstairs with her. It was rather strange to be seated in that comparatively unknown land, the drawing-room, and still stranger to be talked to as if I was one of the family instead of its incubus. Papa and the girls were out riding, and we two had it all to ourselves. I seemed to know more of my mother than I had ever done before; and once she pressed her lips to my forehead and said gently—

"I have left you too much alone, Marguerite; things must be different now."

"They never will be until Maude and Violet are married!" I answered, dejectedly.

"Well, Lord Ashleigh is at home now, so you may not have long to wait," she answered.

We met the others at lunch. The girls treated me with a sort of lofty condescension. Papa ignored my presence; but at least I had one sympathiser. Mamma did not dare to take my part openly, but she spoke to me now and then, and once contrived to send me a smile from her end of the table, which was far removed from my remote corner; so that to my own surprise I did not feel nearly so miserable as I had expected.

My first thought as we left the dining-room was of Bertram. I felt sure he would be waiting for me at our trysting-place. Mamma must have seen the longing look I cast at the window, for she laid her hand on my shoulder, and said cheerfully, "Bring your work into the drawing-room and sit with us," and I dared not disobey.

I often looked back to that afternoon and thought it the longest I ever spent. I sat in the oriel window, a strip of crochet in my hand, my thoughts very far away. I hardly heard the conversation which went on. I watched the clock with my restless eyes as though it ticked aloud the thoughts passing in my head.

"Three o'clock!—he will be expecting me; half-past! he is getting impatient; our o'clock! well, he will give me up now and go home. I hope he will get my letter; he will understand then that it is not my fault. I hope he will not write to me; I should never get the letter; I would much rather that he came."

It was half-past five; the girls had

retired to dress for dinner. My mother was folding up her work; my father, who had just come in from the library, stood talking to her on some neighbour's affairs, when the sound of wheels fell upon our ears. A carriage was dashing up to the front door, drawn by two noble bays, the footman and coachman in a livery familiar to me from childhood.

"Why, those are the Ashleigh servants!" exclaimed my mother. "What can they be doing here?"

"He can't have come to call at this hour," returned papa. "Besides, it was only the day before yesterday I was at the Court, and they said he was in London." And then our conjectures were cut short by the entrance of a servant bearing the Earl's card.

"Lord Ashleigh is in the library, sir; he wished me to say that his business was of great importance, and he hoped you could spare him a few moments of private conversation."

"Say I will be with him at once."

The servant departed; my father turned to his wife, "Have we a decent dinner today, Selina?"

We had always something more than decent dinners, because he was an epicure; but this did not strike him. Mother answered in the affirmative; and he then announced there ordered her to postpone it for half-an-hour, as he meant to invite the Earl; then having made his wife thoroughly uncomfortable, he went off to greet his guest.

"Dinner will be ruined!" groaned mamma. "What will Lord Ashleigh think! And your father is sure to go into a passion."

"Isn't there a nice dinner, mamma?"

"Yes; but it is ordered for six. Marguerite, go into the kitchen and explain things to cook," recollecting that I was a favourite with the kitchen's queen; "perhaps she will take pains if she thinks it is to please you. Tell her you are to dine with us to-night."

I was already in my afternoon muslin, and needed no preparation. I was rather elated at the permission to appear in the drawing-room. Lord Ashleigh was Bertram's friend; of course he would be much too busy with Maude and Violet to take any notice of me; but at least he would not seem quite like a stranger to me.

I conned over in my head all my lover's information respecting the Earl, and was obliged to confess that it was somewhat meagre, after all; all I knew of the nobleman was, that Bertie had known him over thirty years, and that they were inseparable friends. Perhaps, then, my lover had ac-

companied the Earl; but no, that would be too good to be true; so I delivered my message to cook, and then came back to my seat in the oriel window.

I fancied that news of our expected guest had reached my sisters, for they did not make their appearance at six, and so were probably devoting the extra half-hour to embellishment. Mother came back soon in her black velvet and point lace, the picture of a wealthy matron who retained much of the beauty of her youth. She gave me one or two cautions as to my behaviour at this first grown-up dinner at which I assisted; and then she relapsed into silence.

A message came, summoning my mother to the library. I began to be a little curious as to what was going on there. Surely Lord Ashleigh could not be proposing for one of my sisters, without once seeing her! Then I heard the sound of voices, and the three came in—papa and mamma and their visitor. I raised my eyes to look at Bertram's friend, and then stared in glad surprise to see, instead of the Earl, my lover's handsome face and blue eyes.

"Marguerite!" It was papa who spoke; and I had never seen him look at me so benignantly, "Marguerite, this is Lord Ashleigh. I believe he has been known to you under another name. He has come here to ask my consent to your marriage."

"I never deceived you, my darling!" said Bertie, laying one hand lightly on my shoulder, "I am Bertram Travers Lisle. I loved you from the moment I saw you. I had a strange fancy that I should win you best in disguise."

"It was very unfair," I cried indignantly. Mamma bent over me. I fancied there were tears in her eyes. "Don't quarrel with your happiness, my child," she whispered, "Lord Ashleigh is waiting for your answer." And there, with papa and mamma looking on, I placed my hand in my lover's, and repeated to the proud Earl of Ashleigh the promise I had given the day before to the artist, Bertram Travers.

I felt like the creature of a dream. Was it really myself? Had Lord Ashleigh, whom I had always heard spoken of as a most eligible suitor for my beautiful sisters, really the bad taste to choose me? I could not realise it. Papa and mamma seemed well pleased; and I could only wonder what Maude and Violet would say.

They appeared soon, in faultless toilettes fresh from Paris, and in due form were presented to Bertram. He shook hands with each, told Maude laughingly that he was to be her brother some day; and then

we filed in to dinner, most of us still in a great state of perplexity and surprise.

Bertram did not linger with my father after he had left the dining-room : he followed us in about five minutes, and presently he took my hand and led me out through the French windows into the peaceful grounds. "Have you forgiven me?" he said.

"I am very much surprised."

"I could not help it. I meant to win you, Marguerite, if I could teach you to love me ; and I fancied I could teach that lesson best by our two selves alone, than here surrounded by others."

"And now we shall never be alone again," I said regretfully.

"We shall be alone all our lives," he said lightly, "at least I have no intention of inviting Colonel or Mrs. Lindsay or your sisters to spend their lives with us. It only rests with you, my darling, to say when you will come to me."

But I was frightened, and relapsed into silence.

"Were they very unkind to you?" he whispered.

"Dreadfully."

"They wanted you to give me up?"

"They said I should never see you again."

He shuddered. "Don't repeat that, even in jest, I cannot bear to hear you. I think, Marguerite, if I lost you, or any cruel fate separated us, I should not care to live."

His tone was solemnly earnest, quite different from the one in which that morning I had spoken of my own possible demise. I put one hand upon his shoulder, and in the twilight, screened by the leafy trees from all view, I raised my face to his and touched his cheek with my lips. It was the first caress I had ever offered him unsought, and I felt a little ashamed of it.

His grasp on my arm tightened. "You love me, Marguerite?"

"I suppose so," I said in a very injured manner. "I was wishing this morning I didn't."

"You are never to wish that again," he added authoritatively ; "and now before I let you go back to the house, I want an answer to my question ; when will you come to me? You told me long ago you liked my home better than your own. Now tell me when will you come to it as its mistress?"

"I never knew it was your home when I said that," I answered shamefully, "or I should never have said it. It must have seemed to you like fishing for an invitation."

"You have got the invitation now," he retorted, laughingly ; "and it is for life. When are you going to accept it?"

"I don't know."

"Think."

"I am eighteen now ; if I married you when I was twenty-one—"

"Three years!" he interrupted. "I will not hear of it ; three months would be too long."

"But three months is no time at all."

"And what do you want time for?"

I hesitated. I had heard of trousseaux, child as I was, and I did know they took some time to prepare.

Bertie understood the thoughts passing through my mind, and anticipated my answer. "I think I had better fix the time myself if you won't. We will be married in September, Marguerite ; it is my favourite month of all the year. It will be three months then since we met, and that is quite long enough to wait."

"But this is July, and—"

"And you will have eight weeks before you ; that is quite long enough to make a white dress in. If worst came to the worst, you could be married in the one you have on now—it is very pretty."

## CHAPTER V.

'And coming events cast their shadows before.'

**W**E were engaged. It was wonderful what a change the mere fact made in my life. From being the most despised member of the family, I speedily became the most important. Mother spent half her time planning a trousseau worthy of the future Countess of Ashleigh ; papa offered to ride with me (an offer which reduced me to a state of terror, until Bertram declared that as I had never learned, he would prefer to teach me himself, after our marriage) ; the girls lent their taste in the selection of my dresses ; and finally, Marguerite Lindsay occupied more of people's time and attention than any other inmate of the Grange.

I went to the Neston ball ; a word from Bertram, and mamma was as eager to take me as she had been before to keep me in the background. A hasty costume was improvised ; and my mother's maid herself dressed me, while Nurse Grey looked on with eager, anxious eyes.

"Are you really mortal?" Bertram said to me, as I went to show myself to him, before putting on my cloak. "I feel afraid to touch you."

I wondered why, and felt a good deal hurt, for I had thought the dress would

please him. It was all white, the finest, softest tulle, and it glistened here and there as though dewdrops sparkled on it. I wore no ornaments, but on my neck and arms they had twisted chains of my own namesake flowers, natural marguerites.

"Don't you like it?" I asked.

"*Like it!*" he repeated eagerly. "Like is not the word. You look like a fairy, Marguerite, fresh from the fairy groves."

We were late at the ball ; it was the "correct thing" to be late at Neston balls. My sisters made a point of never arriving until all the notables were present ; but when some one fetched me a programme and I saw that we had missed six dances, I was almost ready to cry.

"Never mind," said Bertram, tenderly ; "we can stay to the very last, you know, to make up for it. You will have plenty of dancing, Marguerite ; you are not likely to be a wall-flower."

I had not the least idea what he meant, and wondered, a little wistfully, why he did not ask me to dance the galop then being played ; but he did no such thing, only stood lazily leaning against the wall, watching me.

The last strains of the music died away, and quite a crowd of gentlemen came up to us ; it was very kind of so many young men to be so anxious to dance with me ; and I very nearly began to thank them, only mother looked at me so reprovingly that the words died on my tongue ; and so I placed my hand on the shoulder of my first partner, a tall officer in a captain's uniform, and we began waltzing at once.

"This is your first ball?" he said to me when we paused to take breath. "Any one can tell that by looking at you, Miss Marguerite."

"Am I so very awkward?"

He shook his head. "I meant that you seem to be thoroughly enjoying yourself. No one enjoys a ball after they have been to many."

"Then why do they go?"

"I really cannot tell you," laughing.

"Do you dislike balls, Captain Clifton?"

"Not balls like this one," and he looked at me so keenly that I felt my cheeks get quite hot, and Bertram passing us just then to take an elderly dowager to the refreshment room, gave me a glance of displeasure which I was quite at a loss to understand.

"Why, that's Lisle!" exclaimed my partner. "I had no idea he was in this part of the world."

"That is Lord Ashleigh."

"Do you mean that he has come in for the title? Don't think me quite an ignor-

amus, Miss Marguerite ; but I have just returned from India, and one doesn't hear much news out there."

"I should think not," pityingly. "Why, it is *ever* so long since the old Earl died."

"And Lisle—the old name comes easiest, you see—has settled down as a private gentleman? Wonder if he likes it."

"He has only been here a month. I should think he liked it very well."

"And his wife—is she here to-night?"

I started as though I had been shot. His wife! I was Bertram's future bride ; he had never yet possessed a wife. Was my partner mad? I began to wonder to myself.

"You are surprised," said Captain Clifton ; "perhaps I am mistaken ; but I do not see how I can be. Bertram Lisle and I were great friends once ; besides, you tell me the gentleman who has just passed is the Earl of Ashleigh, and I know my friend was heir-presumptive to that title."

"There is no mistake," I said, in such a hard, cold voice I hardly knew it for my own. "That is Lord Ashleigh ; but he has no wife."

It was the Captain's turn to stare at me. I went on wildly, "He has never been married. We know him well ; I am quite certain of it."

"There must be some mistake," said the Captain, trying hard not to notice my agitation. "If this man be my friend, I was at his wedding. I shall never forget the day. I was a young fellow myself then, and Mrs. Lisle's beauty made a great impression upon me."

The waltz had stopped, but the Captain made no attempt to take me to my next partner, we were both profoundly interested in the subject before us.

"Was she very beautiful?" thinking of my own defects in that respect.

"She was a poet's dream ; I have travelled in many lands, but I never met such an exquisite creature as Bianca Sans Souci."

"I should like to go to my mother, please." My voice was almost extinct. The Captain began to see that he had made some great mistake, but, like the true gentleman he was, he never sought to notice my agitation, but turned at once in search of my mother.

We had hardly gone six steps when we met Bertram. "Is that you, Lisle?"

The greetings between the two were warm and deep, and yet I felt instinctively that Bertram would rather have been spared the meeting. The Captain left us, and I walked on on my lover's arm.

"Where have you been?"—angrily.  
"Mrs. Lindsay is most anxious about you."

"I have been dancing," crossly, for I resented his tone. "Captain Clifton took me into the conservatory to rest."

"That was imprudent," said my lover, coldly. "He ought to have taken you to your mother as soon as the galop or dance was over."

Many other dances followed, with many different partners, but I saw no more of the Captain, only, just as we were waiting for our carriage, I heard a voice at my elbow, and turning round perceived him there.

"I have come to apologise, Miss Lindsay," he said, with great courtesy, speaking so low as only to reach my ear. "When I spoke as I did I had no idea I was addressing the future Countess of Ashleigh. I humbly crave your pardon for my indiscretion."

It was all very well for him to crave my pardon, but he could not give me back the peace he had robbed me of. I never closed my eyes all night, and when Bertram came the next afternoon to take me for a walk he was frightened at my tired, dejected look, and the purple rings under my eyes.

"Dissipation does not suit you, childie," he said fondly, "you look as if you had just got up from a sick bed. What has tired you so?"

"I never want to go to another ball," I cried mournfully. "Balls are a delusion and a snare. I don't think I shall ever be happy again."

We had started on our walk by this time, so there was no one to overhear my cheerful remark. Bertram drew the hand which rested upon his arm nearer to him, and asked tenderly—

"When did you make that discovery, Marguerite?"

"Last night."

"And on what grounds?"

"I felt quite miserable. He says she was most beautiful, a poet's dream he called her. How can you care for me after that?"

"My darling, I have no idea what you are talking about. I can only tell you I do care for you; more, I think sometimes, than is wise for either of us."

"And you care for me more than for any one else?" I asked exactingly.

"More than for any one else in the whole world, you jealous child."

"More than for Bianca Sans Souci?"

The arm on which I leant trembled; his face grew white with strong emotion; my own heart seemed almost to stop its beating, so eagerly did I listen for his reply.

"Who has dared to mention her to you?"  
"Captain Clifton told me."

He muttered an imprecation, but I stopped him. "He did not know—he had no idea you and I were engaged; and he asked me if your wife was at the ball."

Bertram's brow cleared. "I thought Paul was not the man to act a traitor's part. He has been abroad for years—he would not know."

"He did not even know that you were Lord Ashleigh. He told me," hurrying on because the words hurt me so, "that he was at your wedding, and that you married Bianca Sans Souci."

A long, long silence. Bertram did not attempt to break it, and I could not. All my heart was aching wildly. I, who had thought myself first with him, to find that I had a rival in his heart—for a dead wife who in life was beautiful as a poet's dream seemed to me a very formidable rival indeed.

"Well?" I said at last.

"It is true, my darling; I kept it from you out of love. Had I been able to screen you from the knowledge, you never should have learned it."

I burst into tears.

"Do not grieve so, Marguerite. Because long ago, in the folly of youth, I married for mere beauty, why should you grieve? It is my heart's best love I offer you. I promise you that you shall never have a rival, dead or living, in my affection."

"You promise that?"

"I will swear it to you if you like."

I shook my head. "Do not swear, I would rather only have your word. But, Bertram, I think if I lost you it would kill me. I am not beautiful or clever, as she may have been, but you are all I have, and it would break my heart to give you up."

His arms were round me then, and his lips pressed mine passionately. "Only death can part us, sweetheart," he said fondly. "Nothing else can ever come between you and me."

"And you will not think always of her, and compare me to her?"

He shook his head. "Marguerite, never fear that; I married when I was little more than a boy, and my married life was a most unhappy one. I cannot tell you why I kept my wedding secret. Some instinct made me do so. I don't think any one except Paul Clifton knows that I ever had a wife. The subject is one full of pain to me; let us never mention it again."

"I am sure I don't want to; only Captain Clifton spoke of her so admiringly that I thought she must be very lovely."

"Is a snake beautiful, Marguerite?"

"I suppose so," half reluctantly.

"Well, it is a dangerous beauty to cherish in your home. My darling, never trouble your head about my past ; my future belongs to you ; and I promise you it shall be my life's effort to make you happy."

So the trouble that had disturbed me was laid to rest. I trusted Bertram as myself, and from that moment I thought no more of Bianca Sans Souci. I felt sure of one thing—she had never loved him as I did ; and I was well content to know that he gave me back love for love.

Through the pleasant August weather nothing occurred to mar the harmony of our lives. Maude accepted the addresses of a certain Sir Edmund Courtenay, and was proportionately happy and amiable ; mother beamed on us all round ; and even papa looked less implacable than usual—with the prospect of an earl for one son-in-law and a baronet for another he thought he might feel satisfied.

I was to have a grand wedding, in spite of all my entreaties : four young ladies from the neighbouring cathedral city had been invited to augment the number of my bridesmaids. They, with Maude and Violet, were to be arrayed in pale blue silk with forget-me-not hats. I was to wear white satin with a train so long I was convinced I should stumble over it, particularly as the embroidery of my lace veil was so thick that it was impossible for me to see through it.

Hurried as had been the time, mother had worked wonders, and she informed me, with pride, that the French *modiste* declared she never sent out a more elegant trousseau. Wedding presents poured in by dozens ; people I had never heard of made me offerings, and I grew so tired of composing notes of thanks that mother generously took that business off my shoulders.

The library was converted into a sort of exhibition of my presents. Bertram and I wandered through it once a day to look at the latest additions, and wonder how people could choose such hopelessly hideous vases as came to our share.

"Old china is so valuable," said mother, deprecatingly, when we had both turned up our noses at a cabinet-full of hideous cups. "Nothing could be rarer."

I groaned and walked away. "I wish people wouldn't."

"Why?" asked Bertram. "They mean it for kindness, you silly child."

I hesitated, but the look in his eyes encouraged me to go on. "Six months ago I should have been grateful for a crumb of kindness, a little notice or sympathy would have made me happy then ; but no one

troubled their heads about me. Now that you are going to marry me, and they know I shall be a Countess, they have all turned round and can't take notice enough of me. I don't like such ways, Bertie."

He smiled. "It is the way of the world, dear. One comfort, you need not be overburdened by any special amount of gratitude."

The day before our wedding came at last. I had a strange, restless feeling, I could settle to nothing. I wandered about from room to room, saying good-bye to all my old haunts. At last I went upstairs, and locking the door, I proceeded to a private rehearsal of my bridal display. What prompted me I cannot think, for with all my faults I was not vain ; but the impulse was strong within me, and so I put on the rich satin robes, fastening them with difficulty, for I was not used to so much finery ; then I arranged my wreath and veil, and when all was finished I surveyed myself in the glass, and felt almost satisfied with the result. "I am sure I never looked so nice before ; it must be the dress or the veil," I thought.

The idea came into my head to exhibit myself to Bertram. I knew that he was in the house, and I thought he would enjoy a premature view of to-morrow's splendour ; so I unfastened my door and crept gently downstairs to the drawing-room, where I expected to find him talking to mamma. I was not disappointed ; they were sitting opposite each other in the oriel window, and so engaged in conversation that they hardly heeded my approach. Then the *frou-frou* of my satin train fell upon their ear, and they both turned suddenly round and saw me. Bertram's face was full of a deep, keen joy ; he put one hand on my shoulder, and was about to draw me to himself, but the consternation on my mother's brow was too great for him to mistake it.

"You are not vexed?" he said pleadingly. He liked mother better than any of my family. "Marguerite meant to please me."

"It is so fearfully unlucky," groaned my mother. "It is bad enough to try on the things at all after they once come home, but before you——"

She did not finish her sentence, but her terror was too genuine for us to mistake it. I felt cowed, and almost ready to cry.

"You had better take it off, dear," said Bertram. His hand gathered my train together for me to carry it more conveniently, and then he shuddered almost as mother did just before ; from one of the white satin folds there fell a long veil of

crape. How it had got there we could not even guess. Most likely some careless assistant in folding up the dress caught it up, and hanging to the slippery surface of the satin, it had never been disturbed since.

Tired and dismayed, I crept back to my own room, all vanity and self-satisfaction destroyed. Had not mother declared it a terrible thing to try on one's wedding-dress before one's future husband ; and had not I myself seen a widow's veil clinging to my bridal robes ? No wonder I felt nervous and depressed ; I was not naturally superstitious, but the changes of the last three months, the excitement, the new interests that had come to me had made me different from the careless, unromantic child of a year before. Only last spring I should have laughed at such fancies that tormented me now ; but, alas ! I could not laugh at them. More than ever did they return when Nurse Grey had put out my candle and left me alone in bed. I could not sleep ; I dared not attempt to close my eyes ; I seemed to see a crowd of beautiful dark faces like I pictured Bianca San Souci's, or a man with a cold, cruel face measuring yards of widow's crape. I could not sleep ; I could not rest ; never in my life had I spent such a wretched night as that which ushered in my wedding-day.

## CHAPTER VI.

"Had we never loved sae kindly,  
Had we never loved sae blindly,  
Never met and never parted,  
We had ne'er been broken-hearted."

**T**HE day broke at last ; an hour or two of waiting and mother came into my room. It had been decreed that I was not to come downstairs before I was dressed for church, so she bore a tempting breakfast ; but when she caught sight of my face she set the tray down in sheer despair.

"What can you have been doing to yourself, Marguerite ? Your eyes are swollen as though you had been crying."

I did not confess to tears ; I ate my breakfast—or tried to—and my toilet proceeded. When they had finished, I thought to myself the effect was not nearly so satisfactory as it was yesterday ; and when I looked at Maude and Violet, perfect in their blonde beauty, which the forget-me-not tint suited so exquisitely, I wondered more than a little at Bertram's want of taste.

They were ready ; the guests had gone, the bridesmaids had gone, mother had gone herself, and the last carriage was

waiting for papa and me. It was wonderful how short the drive seemed ; papa said nothing, absolutely nothing, but he meant to be kind ; he edged himself into the extreme corner to make room for my floating robes, and this effort at amiability was a very great one indeed—for him.

I was dimly conscious that the church was full of people, even the porch was crammed ; one woman jostled unpleasantly against us as we alighted. She was dark and tall, her eyes black as the raven's wing, her hair the same shade. The thought passed through my head that she must have been pretty once, before her face grew so red and coarse. She was not pretty then ; there was an awful reckless, dissipated look about her, and little as I knew of the world I felt instinctively that she was not a good woman.

My bridesmaids ranged themselves behind me, one of them—Maude, I think—judiciously raised my veil so that I was able to walk without the fear of falling at every step. Bertram and Sir Edmund Courtenay were awaiting us ; the former turned to welcome me, love shining in his eyes. The service was about to begin when there was a little stir among the spectators, not the invited guests, but that portion of the public who bore no cards of admission, and so had not been allowed to pass the scarlet cord which divided the aristocracy of Neston from its less-favoured inhabitants.

The stir became noisier, a struggle of some kind was evidently going on ; the rector looked up from his book and turned his head towards the west end of the church just in time to see a woman deliberately sever the aggressive cord with a penknife and advance towards us. I grew cold as marble ; I had recognised in the intruder the creature I noticed in the porch, the woman from contact with whom I had shrunk as from the touch of some loathsome animal. The rector's voice was raised in reproof, and I saw a look of intense anguish on Bertram's face as the woman's words rang through the church—

"A fine party, truly ! but there'll be no wedding here to-day. Lord Ashleigh has one Countess already ; he married me years ago in Rome, and I have come to claim my rights !"

I remembered nothing more. I suppose I fainted, for all was a blank to me after those fatal words. When I came to myself I was lying on the sofa in mother's own sitting-room, and she was bathing my temples with eau-de-Cologne.

I started up with a cry of agony. "Oh, mother, is it true?"

She soothed me by every means in her power; and when I grew calmer she told me the whole sad story; and vainly though she tried to soften it in the telling, each word fell on my heart like a lump of lead.

Long ago, in sunny Italy, Bertram met and loved Bianca Sans Souci. Against the wishes of his uncle and all his best friends, unknown to any one save Captain Clifton, he married her. The awakening came then; she was coarse and vulgar, unsuited in every way to be the wife of an English gentleman. She had no knowledge of the heritage coming to him, his present means were scanty enough, and so she left him. Drink and other things—mother did not tell me what—brought her down step by step until she became the wreck we saw. Her appeals to Bertram for money were numerous; he never refused them. When at his uncle's death he became Earl of Ashleigh he would not assume his title or come home to his ancient mansion, because he knew that if she heard of his rank she would claim to share it. He might have called upon the law to free him from her, but he could not bear the idea of publishing his sorrow and drawing his old honourable name into the newspapers. In May came the news that she was dead. He never doubted the truth of the report. He paid the funeral expenses, recompensed the people who professed to have cared for her in her last moments, and set sail for England, never dreaming that he was the victim of a plot so cruel and wicked that few could imagine such a refinement of treachery.

I listened patiently. I heard how she tracked him to England, and waited until the very morning which was to see me his wife before she discovered herself. I listened without word or comment, but when mother had done I raised myself on my pillow and whispered, "Let me see him."

Mother looked aghast, but I was firm. "I thought that by this time I should have been his wife. Let me see him, mother, I must say good-bye to him."

She went out in silence for a few moments, and some one else came in. I did not need to raise my eyes. I knew by instinct that it was he—my hero, my life's one love.

"Marguerite!" No words of mine can tell the tenderness with which he spoke my name. It was as though I was dearer to him now even than before. "Can you forgive me?" he whispered. "Dear, I never dreamed the blight I was bringing on you."

"Is it all true?" I answered. "Is she really your wife?"

He could not answer me; he bowed his head.

"And while she lives you are bound to her?"

"Not if there be justice in England," he cried passionately. "I will carry my case from court to court. I will spend my whole fortune, it may be, but I will have my freedom. Her cruel deceit shall be exposed. She shall be punished. It can only be a question of time, and then, my darling, I can come back and claim your promise."

"You cannot, while she lives."

"You do not understand. How should you, my pure, innocent darling? If the law gives me my freedom it will be all one as if she were dead."

I shook my head. "No, not all one."

"What do you mean? Are you going to forsake me and turn against me?"

"I shall love you while I live—"

"Then you will marry me when I am free?"

"Not while your wife is still alive."

"But—"

"Do not tempt me," I cried pitifully. "Oh, Bertie, you know the truth as well as I do. You are her husband; nothing but death can *really* free you. Those whom God hath joined together none else can part."

"I thought you loved me."

I put my two hands into his. "I love you better than myself," I murmured. "You shall not do this thing for me—a thing you would repent of later."

"Never! Oh, Marguerite, my little love, think what our lives will be apart! Have some pity on yourself and me. Can you bear to go back to the cold, loveless life you led before I knew you?"

I was sorely tempted, I loved him so. Child as I was in all else, in the strength of my love I was a woman, and after all, it would be the law's act, not mine, which banished Bianca Sans Souci from her place. Should I not yield? On the one hand, I saw myself in a few brief months an idolised wife, with all that money could purchase or love provide; on the other one again, the family black-sheep, the one of all the household who was emphatically "one too many."

"Yield, my darling," urged Bertram, "yield. Have pity on yourself and me."

But my mind was made up. I was no heroine, but I had a strong natural sense of right and wrong. How could I stand at God's altar and swear to love and honour Bertram whilst his first wife still lived?

Her image would shadow my whole life. I took his hand in mine. "If ever you are free," I whispered, "and come back to me, you will find me waiting. Till then it will be best to part. You are angry with me now; some day you will understand."

He pressed fervent kisses on my face and lips; he called me by a hundred endearing names; but he did not attempt to change my purpose. Mother coming in to see how the interview had sped, found me lying back white and exhausted on my pillows.

"You had better leave her, Lord Ashleigh," she said gravely. "Poor child, she has suffered enough." And he went.

Time, which stays for no one, moved on in his relentless course after my ill-fated wedding-day. My worst fear was not realised. I did not fall back into the isolation from which Bertram's love had rescued me. Early in December, Maude was married to Sir Edmund Courtenay. It was a double wedding, for Violet had brought herself to accept a neighbouring country squire, and they were married on the same day. Everything that could be thought of was done to make the ceremony as unlike that sadly-interrupted one in September as possible. My sisters dispensed with show and state, that there might be nothing to remind me of my sorrow, and when they went away, happy, blooming wives, there were tears in their eyes as they kissed me. They were thinking of the contrast in my fate and theirs.

We who were left settled down to our quiet life at the Grange, I was the only daughter at home now, and papa and mamma made me more of a companion than they had ever done before. The boys—as we still called my brothers—petted me in their brief visits; and if the family love—once so earnestly desired—could have made me happy, I should have had nothing to wish for.

But it could not. From the day that Bertram left me, the sunshine seemed to have gone out of my life. I did not mope, my sorrow was not written on my face; I joined in other people's pleasures and amusements after the first shock was over; but for all that I felt that I should never be happy again. The agony that it was to know I must spend my life without him, the misery to think that no winter snow or summer sunshine would bring him back again, no tongue can tell. I used to wonder sometimes how I should feel when I grew quite old. I never hoped for Bianca's death, never. I could not have

done that; it would have seemed to me a sin. Besides, she was not old; the probability was she would outlive Bertram and myself. If only I could have died! How I longed for death! My whole life seemed blighted; and yet the trouble that had quenched my happiness at one blow was powerless to undermine my health.

After the first year, when my sad story was becoming fast a thing of the past, to please my mother I went into Society. I was as great a favourite in Neston as ever my sisters had been; and more than one man, in spite of that sad episode in my life, asked me to be his wife. I never hesitated—never once. I gave the same answer to all. It was impossible—I never should love again!

"Are you mad?" asked my sister Violet of me one day, when I was staying with her at her town house for the London season, and a young marquis had taken his departure crestfallen because I had refused the honour of his hand. "Don't you know that Lord Lestrange is the lion of the season?"

"Yes."

"And you have refused him!"

"Don't scold me, Vi," I pleaded. "I can never marry any one I do not love."

"And why not love the marquis?"

I shook my head.

"You are never thinking of that old affair with Lord Ashleigh? Why that is three years ago now, and every one has forgotten all about it. I don't suppose, if that woman died to-morrow, he would come back to you."

I answered nothing; I could not.

"And after all," said my sister, reflectively, "he was not such a desirable parti: he was most eccentric, and after your triumphs, Marguerite, you need not throw yourself away upon any one."

My triumphs! If she had only known how little I valued them. Yes; it was true, three years had passed. I was twenty-one now, and this was my second London season. As Vi said, my youth would pass soon. Well, I did not care; time might never bring my Bertram back to me, but at least I would be true to him—true to him in life and death.

That discussion with my sister had brought on a nervous head-ache. I could not accompany Violet and her husband to the large ball where we were all expected. Instead, I remained at home in the pleasant, cool, shady drawing-room, quite alone, and a little relieved to find myself so, for the perpetual whirl of gaiety in which we lived tired me at times.

Twenty-one! Was I changed from the

girl Bertram had loved three years ago? If Fate brought us two together, would he recognise me? I should know him among a thousand.

A servant came in and drew the curtains. He lighted the lamp and retired, only to return in a moment to say that a gentleman had called to see his mistress on important business. As Mrs Pemberton was out, perhaps I could receive him; Violet had a perfect frenzy for lions of all kinds, especially embryo lions, whose fame had yet to come; I never doubted that this stranger was one of the many poets and artists who flocked to her "at homes." The night of these had been changed from Tuesday to Thursday; perhaps the present applicant had not heard of the alteration.

"I will see him, if he likes, Brooks." But Brooks was so long in returning, that I concluded the stranger did *not* like, and resumed my book. Looking up from it suddenly I perceived that I was not alone, some one had entered, unobserved, and now stood watching me furtively, as though not sure of his welcome. My heart throbbed violently. It was Bertram!

"You told me long ago," he whispered, as he sat with one arm round my waist and my head upon his shoulder, "that if ever I were free I was to come back to you."

"And you have come?"

"Ay; but to find you the belle of a London season, not the lonely child of three years ago."

"I told you, Bertie, whenever you came you would find me waiting."

"They say at the clubs that you will marry that fool Lestrange."

"I shall never marry but one man," I said shyly, "and he does not seem inclined to ask me."

"Marguerite! do you mean it? Will you really come to me, my little love?"

"Only one thing kept me from you," I said timidly. "Oh, Bertie, it has been weary work, living without you all these years."

"And what has it been to me? Oh, Marguerite! how my heart has longed for you!"

He told me presently that his wife had died in the early spring, and lay buried in her native land. He did not say so in

words, but I gathered that he was with her at the last, and that he forgave her freely, poor erring one!

When Violet returned she found Bertram and myself sitting on the sofa as composedly as though we had never been separated. I think when she saw the happiness on my face she forgave me for refusing the marquis, and she eagerly endorsed her husband's invitation to my darling to make their house his headquarters.

Our engagement was once more announced; but to Violet's horror and mother's too, I would not attempt to name our wedding day, nor allow them to order a single thing towards a trousseau. After that scene in our village church I could not have borne to look forward to a wedding. But one lovely morning in July, when the season was almost over, Bertram's carriage came to take me for a drive, and he begged mother and Violet to come with us. We started quite early, and instead of driving in the park, he turned into quiet roads and lanes until at last we found ourselves in a remote western suburb. The carriage stopped before the gate of a beautiful old church, and we all alighted and walked up the gravel path.

No one said anything to me, and I asked no questions, only clinging a little more closely to Bertram's arm as I found we were actually going into a church. Vi had made me put on a white dress because she said I should be so much cooler; but still no suspicions came to me of what was to happen until I saw a clergyman in his surplice, standing waiting for us with an open book.

The birds sang sweetly through the half-open windows, at which the ivy peeped in, and an old clerk hovered about behind the clergyman; but of other spectators there were none excepting my mother and Violet while the words were spoken which bound us together.

We came down the aisle half-an-hour later, man and wife, a deep, glad thankfulness at our hearts that for all time we belonged henceforward to each other. The joy of that sweet summer morning atoned to me for the anguish I had felt when I was forced to refuse Bertram's pleadings, although I had indeed undergone a SOFT TEMPTATION.

FLORENCE HODGKINSON.

# TEA-TABLE TALK.—BY AMY KEN.

## CONTENTS.

Miss Ken at Home Again.  
A Description of the Needles.  
The Lighthouses.

Dangerous Ground.  
The New Friends.  
Various Adventures.

**M**ISS KEN'S arrival had been anxiously looked forward to by the elder Marstons as well as the junior branches of the family; and Uncle William was again permitted to attend the assembly. It was quite true Miss Ken had arrived the day before, but she had not made her appearance to the juveniles, and a discussion was arising whether they had not mistaken her intentions. "Perhaps," said Uncle William, "she will not be here, after all."

"She's certain to come," replied Helena, "for Aunt Ken is a model of punctuality; but the fact is, we have been so anxious to meet her that we have all assembled a quarter of an hour before the usual time."

Just as the clock was striking five a rustle of silk was heard, the door opened, and the younger nieces, forgetful of their ordinary decorum, rushed forward to seize aunt in their youthful arms and embrace her. This was lovingly accepted on Miss Ken's part, and yet with that undefined grace, so peculiarly her own, showing deep affection without being too demonstrative. She gave kindly welcome to her elder guests; and Uncle William, by the way of apology for being present, said—

"Miss Ken, we have heard so much about the Isle of Wight from these girls that we want to hear more; they took us as far as the Needles, and there they got stuck. Now, that portion of the coast I want much to hear about, for my nieces tell me that you were bold enough to land upon those deserted rocks."

"Not exactly; but the journey appeared so perilous, and we viewed the dangerous Needles so closely, and then passed on to other rocks and caves, that I do not wonder at the young ladies being bewildered. As far as the Needles are concerned, there are, according to the evidence of mariners, five, but only three of them are distinctly visible, rearing their sharp, craggy points above the surface of the water. They extend almost in a straight line considerably out to sea, and, as you all know, are a source of great apprehension to ships under a heavy westerly gale. There is little doubt that they were at one time a part of the island from which they have been gradually disengaged by the action of the sea. Besides these five needles that are traceable, it is said there was another rock belonging to the cluster which had much more of the needle character than the

others, and was known by the name of 'Lot's Wife,' but which, being gradually undermined by the action of the waves, fell with a tremendous crash in 1764. The lighthouse so boldly perched on the outer part of the most westerly rock is a recent erection, only built in 1858, the rock on which it stands having been previously cut down to the water's edge. It is 100 feet high, and has only one light, but this is so concentrated and powerful that it can be seen at a distance of ten miles at sea. The reason of its erection was owing to that which is properly speaking the 'Needles Lighthouse' standing on a high elevation. It is apt to be obscured by heavy fogs, and therefore, as sailors had depended on this guide in thick weather, it became sometimes the cause rather than the prevention of shipwreck. It is a splendid light, however, in fine weather, standing 470 feet above high-water mark, and lighted by ten Argand lamps, which will soon be substituted by the electric light."

"Ah, now we are getting at it," exclaimed Uncle William. "I know when I went to sea more than thirty years ago the lighthouse I saw was on the mainland. But tell us, did you land on the Needles?"

"Certainly not; it is rather hazardous work, even in the finest weather, for experienced sailors to get up into the lighthouse, which is about the only thing they can do, and for ladies to run up rope-ladders and then be hauled in would scarcely be thought decorous, even by you, Mr. William."

"I stand corrected," answered that gentleman. "But tell us where you did land, for Judith said she and her sisters went over dangerous crags that would have defied their efforts were it not for certain gallant young gentlemen who were very devoted to their interests."

"Now the cat's out of the bag," whispered Judith, glancing at her sisters; but the words were partially heard by Miss Ken, who gave rather a forbidding frown, and for a moment there was silence, which was only interrupted by Mr. Marston asking whether there was any romantic episode attaching to this affair.

"None that I know of, except that the young ladies became a little ungovernable, and chose to brave dangers that I dares not encounter; but this will appear in the sequel. We went close enough to the Needles to

see the enormous quantity of wild fowl hovering around the rocks and oftentimes driven from their resting-place by the echoing sound of a bugle that a young gentleman in another boat blew; and having rounded the Needles, we came upon Scratchell's Bay, where certainly the wildest and most picturesque scenery I ever viewed is to be seen. The bay is rather small, the cliffs are entirely of chalk, and in the front of which is to be seen a remarkable cave—a vast and spacious recess, presenting every appearance of a splendid arch of elegant and artistic proportions. We would have been quite satisfied with the view from the sea of a vaulted roof nearly 300 feet in height, and the whole forming an alcove overhanging the beach 150 feet; but unfortunately the boat which preceded us had landed its passengers, and the gentleman with the bugle sounded a call, and after conducting us to *terra firma*, shouted 'Quite safe, "Magnificent," and another gentleman, in still more persuasive tones, called out, 'Come on, ladies—you may never view such scenery again.' I told the boatman to return, but Judith and Annie, and indeed all the rest, begged so hard, that I at length gave way, particularly when I saw that accompanying the gentlemen were two ladies, one as old as myself. Certainly these gentlemen were very polite; they handed us on to the shingle-landing, and a little way within the cavern a servant was spreading luncheon. We soon found that the whole party came from London, and occupied a superior position in society; and we were induced to land our camp-stools, which we always carried with us, and partake of our new friends' repast, and I began to enjoy their society. The young men were cousins, the elderly lady mother to the one, and also to the young lady. They sang duets, and there were solos with refrains in which we could all join. 'Now,' said one of these young men, 'we must go on an exploring expedition.' I looked imploringly upon my nieces to say 'no,' but they appeared determined to go, and indeed the young men planned the thing so quickly that I had no time for reflection. It was something like this: 'Ah! you and mother sit down quietly here and rest; we shall be back in half an hour. Come on, Louis; come on, young ladies;' and really the latter seemed to fly with delight as soon as the words were uttered; and then they went down chasms, over high cliffs, along precipices, whilst the mother and I hid our faces from very fear. I think I must have felt exactly as the poor hen does when she is brooding ducks, and the latter having seen water for the first

time, swim with delight over its surface, whilst the poor foster-mother, having the same maternal instincts as if they were her chickens, clucks wildly, as if urging them to return. Our young party, however, came back at last. How thankful we old women were! Never again, I thought, shall this happen; but it did happen, for all that. The young men did not think it right that we should have no male protector; so when we found ourselves on the sea again, one of the former posted himself in our boat, and Annie had located herself in the boat of our new acquaintances. It was no use frowning. 'Out for a holiday' fashion would prevail over all my prudent advice. 'Home again! not a bit of it. We must sail under the majestic cliffs of Main Reach and the Nodes, which rise to an altitude of 617 feet.' The principal prominencies have received special designations, such as *Old Pepper Rock*; the *Bridge Rock*, a very curious freak of nature, where a mass of chalk is fixed between a detached pyramid and the cliff; others are *Roe Hall*, *Lord Holmes' Parlour*, and *Lord Holmes' Cellar*. In the latter it was said the governor of the island kept his choicest wines, and in the former he feasted his friends. Here we were almost compelled to land, and prepared for the occasion, doubtless, was a very old-looking bottle made of leather, assumed to be found within the aforesaid cellar. The contents were certainly very good, though none of us ventured to take more than a sip. Here the young folks again became unruly; they would jump about like goats over crags and down ravines; and I believe if I had not insisted with all my might they would have gone down the *Frenchman's Hole*, ninety feet deep, where a French prisoner, soon after the battle of Waterloo, is said to have concealed himself and starved to death. How thankful I was to land at Freshwater Gate and find we could get comfortable accommodation for the night! Our new friends had a farther distance to go before they reached home, and thus we parted, never expecting to see each other again, so far as I was concerned."

"But we did see the young gentlemen next morning," said Judith; "they naturally called to inquire whether we suffered in consequence of unusual exertions."

"Now, we shall discover a lady's secret, perhaps," said Uncle William.

"Not to-day," replied Aunt Ken. "Good jokes will keep; and as it is getting late we must defer further adventures till another day; and I must really suggest that at our next meeting we do not confine ourselves too much to one subject."

## FAMOUS MEN AND WOMEN.

### THE DUCHESS OF SUTHERLAND.

**T**HE present Duchess of Sutherland is not to be confounded with her mother-in-law, who was one of the first, if not the very first, Mistresses of the Robes the Queen appointed when coming to the Throne. In the early days of her reign, wherever her Majesty went the Duchess of Sutherland accompanied her ; and the Queen was quite conscious that the beauty of her companion was more attractive than that of the wearer of the Crown. Indeed, in quiet conversations away from the bustling crowd, the Queen used to comment on the extreme loveliness of the Duchess, and exclaim " You ought rather to have been a Queen than myself ; you are tall, and fair, and beautiful, whilst I am short, with indifferent complexion, and wanting symmetry." But the Duchess would remind the Queen that she had virtues superior to her own, and that the people would love her for the qualities of her mind and the display of sound sense and amiability. The Duchess, four years younger than the Queen, was called the "Queen of Beauty" for many seasons ; it mattered not what fashion of dress was in vogue, the Duchess of Sutherland's form and figure seemed suited to all. Notwithstanding being the mother of eleven children, she long kept up her juvenility, and was ever a favourite at Court ; but the Duke, who was much older than herself, died in 1861, when the Duchess retired from public life, and followed her husband to the grave in 1868.

The present Duchess of Sutherland is the only daughter of the late John Hay Mackenzie, Esq., of Cromarty, and sole heiress to his vast estates ; and in 1861 the Queen was pleased to create her a peeress in her own right, under the title of the Countess Cromarty; Viscountess Tarbet, Baroness Castlehaven, and Baroness McLeod, all in the peerage of the United Kingdom, with remainder to her second surviving son, who will thus have as many titles as her eldest surviving son, the Marquis of Stafford. It is remarkable that the second Duchess of Sutherland should exactly resemble in her beauty and mode of life the preceding Duchess, combining all the good qualities of her mother-in-law with a generous disposition, which has done much to soothe the miseries of the poor in districts where his Grace has an interest, as well as in districts where she is personally in possession of estates.

On the 20th of June, 1849, being just twenty years of age, she was married to the then Marquis of Stafford, by special licence, at Cliefden House, near Maidenhead, the ceremony being performed by the Dean of Lichfield, and it was then

remarked that a more charming bride was never escorted to the altar. The bride and bridegroom after the ceremony proceeded to Chiswick, where their reception was the most flattering that had ever been seen in that neighbourhood.

Very soon the Marchioness of Stafford became the star amongst the higher circles during the London season, no select parties were complete without her presence, and Royal personages always placed the Marchioness on their special list. Her grace and beauty were proverbial, whilst her virtue and amiability were set forth as examples.

In February, 1861, the late Duke of Sutherland died, and her husband becoming the head of the family, came into possession of vast estates, including whole counties in Scotland, and thousands of fertile acres and rich mines in Shropshire and Staffordshire. In the latter counties the Duchess is so highly regarded that in villages where any new improvements are desired to be carried out, such as cleanly houses, cultivated gardens, &c., the clergyman or other person who is promoting the movement has only to intimate that " the Duchess of Sutherland may possibly pass that way, and she hopes to see something done in the matter," than the landlords at once commence action and the good work is accomplished.

In higher circles, with dignity and self-possession, the Duchess of Sutherland generally presides over the grandest entertainments of the season, and even at the present day retains her great beauty and charm, although she is now a grandmother. Perhaps the most delightful christening party ever known in London was when the Princess of Wales stood sponsor for the Duchess's youngest daughter, who was called Alexandra, after her Royal Highness. But in 1869 the fashionable world talked of little else for nine days than the princely entertainment given by the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland at Stafford House to his Highness the Viceroy of Egypt. The fête consisted of a banquet and an assembly. For the former covers were laid for over forty guests, which is a vast number when Royal state is kept up, and the Duke and Duchess's arrangements were on a scale of princely hospitality. All the Court ceremonies were observed ; foreign Princes, of whom there were several, had to be entertained ; and the English Princes, including the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Cambridge, were early guests ; and later in the evening, when the Duchess had her assembly in compliment to the illustrious guests, over five hundred of the leading members of the aristocracy graced Stafford

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### THE DUCHESS OF SUTHERLAND.

House by their presence. The noble picture-gallery and suite of principal saloons were thrown open for the reception, and brilliantly illuminated. The Royal family including the Prince and Princess of Wales, remained until one o'clock, when the Viceroy took his departure, and His Highness was heard to say that he never was entertained so splendidly, and he never saw such a charming hostess. In no country in the world but England could such rank and beauty be brought together, except it be at the Court of a ruling Sovereign.

Soon after this entertainment of the Vice-roy of Egypt a rumour reached the Duke that underneath a portion of his Grace's Sutherland estates gold was found, and he and the Duchess determined to view for themselves whether the soil was as auriferous as had been reported. The gold-fields were said to be not far from Dunrobin Castle. The Duke made a first visit alone, and he was met by a large assembly of diggers, who took the horses out of the carriage and dragged it in triumphal procession for a considerable distance. His Grace finally alighted and walked at the head of the procession, which was led off by a couple of pipers, to the tent village.

Arrived at the tents, the diggers clustered round his Grace, who in the course of a short address expressed the pleasure he felt in seeing around him so many good-looking, stalwart fellows engaged in such a novel and interesting occupation. He scarcely knew how to thank them for the splendid and enthusiastic reception they had given him on his first visit to the Kildonian diggings; but in order to reciprocate in some measure such an expression of their goodwill, he would have great pleasure in offering an ox and a cask of beer to be sent down to them from Dunrobin. Loud and prolonged cheers of course greeted these remarks.

His Grace took off his coat and set to wash some of the earth himself, and was fortunate enough to find a pretty respectable nugget, weighing a penny-weight, which he said he would have made into a pin, and a nugget nearly three ounces was produced as found the day previously, and presented to him. Well, the ox and the beer were sent, but the diggers were in want of food again a few days afterwards, when the Duchess liberally supplied them; she also guaranteed to buy their findings at full price, as at that time no exchange was established; but, alas! with the exception of the purchases made by her Grace, which were few in number and much exaggerated, there was little gold to sell, and things became worse and worse.

Inducements were held out to the diggers to take other employment, but the gold mania had set in, and they seemed determined to stick to it. The Duke in the meantime had become determined to form a deer-park, and, in addition to the diggers, drove poor creatures away from homes that had been their parents' and their grandparents', in a somewhat similar manner to the action taken against the Skye crofters.

The poor people believed in the Duchess, but their petitions never reached her; and the people who had to leave their loved abodes are not particularly partial to the Duke of Sutherland even now.

To return to the Duchess, however. When the Conservatives came into power in 1874 she accepted, as Mistress of the Robes to the Queen, the office that her mother-in-law had held in the earliest period of the Queen's reign, and she retained this position for six years; but when there came a change of Government there necessarily came a change in the Mistress of the Robes and the Maids of Honour, for the Cabinet assumes a right to select those ladies whose politics agree with their own. The Duchess of Sutherland is, however, one of the Queen's great favourites, and she is popular wherever she goes.

She has not passed through life without the ordinary troubles which fall upon all, rich or poor. Her first-born son, who had the title of Earl Gower, being born in his grandfather's lifetime, was the pride of his parents; but he only lived to be eight years of age, and his death caused much sorrow to the family. The present heir, the Marquis of Stafford, was born in 1851, but is not married. The next in succession is Francis, Viscount Tarbet, who is heir to his mother's title and estates. He was born in August, 1852, and married, in 1876, Lilian Janet, second surviving daughter of Godfrey, fourth Lord Macdonald. There was much rejoicing over this marriage; and when, twelve months afterwards, a daughter was born, who was more delighted than the juvenile-looking grandmother? This child, this pet of the family, died fourteen months afterwards. A little boy was born in 1881, but it only lived two days.

These were disappointments; but a heavier affliction was in store for the Duchess. Her daughter Florence married the wealthy Henry Chaplin, Esq., M.P., in 1876. They had three children; but Lady Florence died in 1881, and her mother felt this severely; yet, like all good women, she struggled hard to be reconciled to the loss.



# KITTY O'GRADY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "BLUE BEARD'S CASTLE," "NEARER AND DEARER," "UNDER THE SWORD," ETC.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE O'GRADYS OF BALLYBROPHY.



IM COSTIGAN, of the Cross Roads, was dead, and having a large "following," or clan, his wake was to be well attended, and his funeral one of special state and importance.

The bitter sharpness of the short winter's day was changing into the stiller but even colder evening, when the expected guests, or mourners (you could look on them in either light) met at the small cabin in which Tim Costigan lay in all the unspeakable majesty of death—as far removed from his former associates and poor surroundings as though he had been when alive the greatest and most potent monarch. The atmosphere was thick with tobacco and turf smoke, and even the splendour of four candles that burnt near the corpse, together with two more that stood on the

"dresser," failed to light it up. It was a queer, weird scene, worthy of Rembrandt, and, indeed, most suggestive of some of his pictures, with odd effects of light and shade, and flashing gleams from the bogwood with which the fire was replenished. The faces, too, young and old—the old drawn, and puckered, and brown with age; the young, cheery and bright, even in the awful presence of Death—these would have been good studies for an artist.

At intervals the sound of the chattering, gossiping voices was hushed—thrown into the background, as it were, by other sounds. It was (in some remote places in the South and South-West of Ireland it still is) the fashion to have professional mourners in attendance, both at the "wake" and the funeral. If you have never heard these "keeners," as they are called, you have missed a very new and striking sensation. There were four of these women seated in solemn state near the corpse. Their cry was not incessant, human lungs not being made of leather; as I have said, it was taken up from time to time, exactly when it could come in most effectively.

In the intervals of the keening the conversation waxed incessant. All talked at once, and talked of everything—love, war, politics (they were all hot politicians, each man and woman of them), the affairs of the neighbourhood—nothing came amiss to them.

One topic was of general interest. Each face, except that motionless one on the bed, lighted up with new excitement when it was touched on. "Is it true, then—all out?" "Faith, sorra a lie in it." "More's the pity." "It's a poor day when the

O'Gradys must sell and go out, 'neck and crop.' What is the world coming to, at all?"

There were some, to be sure, sufficiently awake to common sense and the common principles of justice and fair play to be conscious that there might be some good reason for Mr. O'Grady of Ballybrophy wishing to sell his small property; for, in the first place, he was head-over-heels in debt. He was an easy-going, idle, good-humoured old fellow—that most deplorable character, "nobody's enemy but his own," which means, in plain English, he really was the enemy of a good many, certainly without intending it.

The butcher and baker, whom he did not pay; his son, whom he had brought up in that sort of sacred idleness almost peculiar to the Irish gentleman of small means; even his pretty, blue-eyed, red-lipped daughter, sweet Kitty O'Grady—was he not the enemy of all these? Neither son nor daughter would have a penny "to bless themselves with." Unless Desmond emigrated (the one panacea for Irish maladies) and pretty Kitty married (an equal remedy for portionless maidens' misfortunes), their lot would be a hapless one. Not that it troubled Desmond O'Grady the elder; he drank his unpaid-for claret, and wore his unpaid-for clothes, and was content. Even when, as a last resource, the acres that had been his ancestors and his for so many years were to be sold, his easy *sang froid* did not desert him.

But if the older and wiser of the guests at old Costigan's wake felt that Mr. O'Grady was to blame, they were quite wise enough not to say so, only dropping in a word or two, eked out with a nod, like a sort of Greek chorus. "True for ye! So it is, faith! Ah, divil a doubt of it! See that now."

Nothing, or very little, was known of the new-comer of Ballybrophy, except that he was, if not that hated animal, "an Englishman," one very nearly as bad, "a black North-countryman." "A Presbyterian!" added one, without knowing anything at all about it. Mr. O'Grady and his children were, at all events, better than *that*, they thought.

"An' what'll become of them?" asked an old man. "The ould gentleman can't do a hand's turn; an', indeed, for the matter of that, Misther Desmond himself is a real O'Grady: if he's able to shave himself it's as much as he can do."

"He can ride, anyhow," said a little man, who looked like the very shabbiest horse-jockey in the world.

"What's the use o' that? They have

not got four legs to carry him, barrin' the ould donkey."

"He's a prime boy all out," said a sedate, middle-aged man. This might be taken either as a compliment or the reverse.

"Where'll they go to live, I wonder?" said another.

"Oh, I do hear that the new gentleman won't take up the place for a bit—till the old man and his childher can look about them. He's laid up wid the gout, an' as cross as a bear wid a sore paw. Miss Kitty will be very lonesome leaving the old place."

"Faix, ye may say that! And for the matter o' that, so ought Misther Desmond."

"Hush!" said half a dozen voices together; and as they spoke a new-comer entered — none other than Desmond O'Grady himself.

He was a handsome young man, of that there could be but one opinion. Blue-eyed, like all the O'Gradys of Ballybrophy; tall, and well-made, and ruddy. When you saw him for the first time you said to yourself, how very handsome he was. If a further acquaintance with him did not cause you to change your opinion, it certainly modified it; for the blue eye could look both sulky and fierce, the ruddy cheek was sometimes blazing with passion or with drink, and the sweet, Southern accent could be raised in violent and senseless abuse. This, to be sure, is giving you his worst side. There was a better one, when Desmond O'Grady could be "the best company in the world," when he could be generous, warm-hearted, and affectionate, and when you quite understood why the gay young fellow was the "pet of the country side."

Brought up to no profession (as to trade, of course that was out of the question with one who boasted a direct descent from Milesian monarchs), with no money, with some brains, proud and clever after a fashion, if you laughed with or at him for a little, you were inclined to sigh for him afterwards.

He came in, stooping a little to shield his curly brown head from the low doorway, after duly kicking and scolding a couple of big red setters to make them keep without, which they did, only now and then poking in their handsome heads a little, as if to assure themselves that their beloved master was close at hand.

With a half-nod of recognition or greeting, he threw himself on a chair—the chair, I should say, for others there were none, the rest of the company being seated on stools and benches—that was put forward

for him. Then a glass of very hot and very strong whisky-punch was handed to him, and he drank it off at one draught. His entry had rather damped the spirits of the company; it was an honour, to be sure, but, like some honours, it had a share of embarrassment in it, and nobody knew how to pick up the broken thread of the conversation.

It was Desmond himself who spoke first. "So the old man's gone at last!" he said, with a look at the still, ashy face that was lit up, after a ghastly fashion, by those four candles. His speech broke the spell.

"Faix, he's got the start av us, anyhow!" said a lame old fellow, who sat near the door. This personage was called "Jamie the Boccaugh," or cripple. He was a very privileged person, being half-witted—"a natural," as they call such a person in Ireland. Large, dim blue eyes, roving continually from one person to another, gave his face a vacant look.

"Any news, Master Desmond?" asked another guest, respectfully.

"None; only that 'tis awfully cold—not here, certainly, for, by Jove! you've got a fire that would roast an ox."

"Shure, 'tis perished alive we'd be only for the bit of fire," said an old woman. Then came a little pause, and the keeners set up their professional lament; while it continued it was good manners to keep silence, or to speak in low tones, the latter alternative being the most palatable.

Desmond O'Grady kept silence, however, moodily looking into the heat of the red fire, the flames of which sent all sorts of queer reflections on the walls of the cabin—even on the grim face of the dead man.

Two old crones, withered and brown as the autumn leaf that is tossed about by the November wind, whispered together, their big white caps nodding as they bent their poor old heads till they met. "I say it, an' I never was wrong, Biddy," said the elder and leaner of the two: "it's an unlucky day when them who have lived in the old place melt away like snow in summer. My mother—rest her soul!—she knew many a thing, an' she foretold how the O'Gradys would pass away, and a strange man from the 'Black North' would come in their place. Isn't *that* queer? An' as for Master Desmond himself, he was born on an *unlucky day*, and he'll never know luck."

"More's the pity," said Biddy.

"Faix, 'tis a pity, then," said Sally. "An'—whisper, Biddy—did ye see him when he kem into the house? Did ye notice how he kem in, agra?"

"Yerra no. What about it?"

"He kem in, then, left fut first for one

thing; an' then, as if that wasn't enough, if he didn't *turn his back to the corpse*; and when he set down—may the saints guard us!—he set down in the *very chair that Tim Costigan always used!*"

She spoke in such a dark, prophetic whisper, with such rolling of the eyes and shakes of the head, that Biddy—not so well-versed in signs and omens—asked in a frightened voice, "An' what if he did, Sally? You can read fortunes: what's the right meaning of it, at all?"

"Well, my mother was a great hand entirely at tilling fortunes, an' nobody could touch her at reading the cards, an' indeed I think it's myself has got the gift too. But, for the matter of that, anybody knows that 'tis the most unlucky thing at all to come into the house where the keeners are *crying* with the left fut first, but that might be mended, only for the other misfortunate things he done." Biddy crossed herself devoutly, and looked at Desmond O'Grady.

Sally went on, with her lips so close to the ear of the other that nobody else could hear. "It's as plain as the nose on me face, Biddy," she whispered. "He's near his end! An' if 'tis as I say, he won't die aisy, nor in his bed, young as he is; maybe you an' I'll live to see him taken."

"Yerra, woman alive! is that the way of it?" whispered Biddy.

"That's what me mother tould me, an', for the matter o' that, I seen it ineself more than once. He kem into the house wrong fut first, then he turned his back on the corpse—may the heavens be his bed! —an' then he set in the chair that the corpse used to sit in! Put that an' that together, an' what d'ye make of it, but a sudden an' a near death, an' a violent one?"

While the crones were settling the fate of the young man after this dismal fashion, there was pleasanter work going on around. There were small flirtations, and little jokes, and comfortable matronly consultations; and when the keeners came to a pause, then the conversation became general. They were too much used to Mr. (or, as they called him, Master) Desmond to allow his presence to deter them from a genial interchange of small talk. Very small, perhaps, you would think it; and yet, oh! my lady, fresh from May Fair, and only caring for "Society" small talk, perhaps there was nearly as much life and interest in the gossip of the friends and acquaintances wh<sup>o</sup> were doing all honour to old Tim Costigan's memory as in the lisping undertones of Captains Rag and Famish, or the chatter of the dowagers

who assemble in *your* drawing-room for five-o'clock tea.

Desmond O'Grady, indeed, did not take much part in the conversation. He had come hither "to kill time." It was as good, or better, to sit here, listening to the country gossip, as to sit at home, where his father was always cross and out of humour if a fellow did but spend sixpence more than was absolutely needful ; and Desmond O'Grady was a better hand at spending than at making money. To be sure, there was Miss O'Grady, otherwise "Kitty O'Grady," the flower of the country-side, and a sister that any man might be proud and fond of. Poor Kitty ! Desmond *was* fond and proud of her. But she was a woman, and therefore not to be considered very good company. She was apt to give him good advice, and didn't like the company he preferred, and he was in no humour to-night for what he called "lecturing."

So the time went on, and Kitty O'Grady had waited up until past midnight, hoping for Desmond's return ; then, with a sigh, she closed her book and stole upstairs ever so softly, lest she should awaken her father. But old age sleeps lightly. Mr. O'Grady called her as she crept past his door, and Kitty knew that he always expected an instant obedience—from her, at least ; I fear that from Desmond he had long ceased to expect it.

But it was of Desmond that the poor old gentleman was thinking. "Hasn't that brother of yours come in yet ?" he asked, raising his grey head from the pillow. A handsome head it was still, though time and care had marked the face and thinned the silver hair.

"No, sir," said Kitty. "I think he said he was going to look in at poor Costigan's wake."

But Mr. O'Grady's fit of gout was sharp, and his temper was up to fever heat ; he replied in an angry voice, "Pooh ! He didn't stay there till this hour. Don't tell me. Most likely he's drinking at Massy's public-house. I'll see if I can't stop that fellow's licence. Nothing but mischief going on there."

Kitty stood by in pained silence. She knew that her father would, in all probability, never again sit on the magistrates' bench. The doctor had been with him this very night, and Kitty knew too well what his opinion was.

"And he knows how matters are here and doesn't care," then the old man's voice fell into an angry whisper. Presently it broke out again, with a new question, "Did young Sullivan come with the money

for the bay colt?" Alas ! troubles upon troubles. It had come to this pass with them now, that a five-pound note was a scarce commodity ; and money, or rather the want of it, was at the root of much of their distress.

But Kitty, with many another lesson, had learned this—that suspense and delay do not make a difficult answer more easy. She did not hesitate then, but said, in her clear, sweet voice (and if it had just a suspicion of what some rudely call "a brogue" in it, it was not a whit the worse), "No, father ; there was some mistake about the matter, I believe ; he's no' going to keep the colt."

"Why, what do you mean, child ?"

"He sent back the colt, sir. Desmond means to sell it at the fair."

But this innocent little attempt to make the very best of a bad thing did not satisfy Mr. O'Grady. "Sent back the colt !" he repeated. "Do you mean to tell me that after buying it he sent it back, the mean cur ?"

"Desmond will tell you about it, dear," said poor Kitty, her eyes filling with tears.

"I'll make young Sullivan tell me all about it," said the angry old man, with a start of pain. "There, child, go to bed—go to bed," and so Kitty was dismissed from the audience.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE NEW OWNER OF THE OLD PLACE.

**F**ROM "the Black North" came the gentleman who, having bought Ballybropy, meant, most naturally, to live there. He was in all respects the very antipodes of the old Squire. He was not handsome, for one thing, and every O'Grady of Ballybropy had been handsome. He was not old, he was in the prime of life. He was a cool, calculating, determined man, who paid his way, and looked on debt as a crime, and on extravagance as a sinful folly. He was not come of a long-descended race, and, indeed, his grandfather had been a poor weaver in Belfast. And, yet here he was actually able to buy these possessions, and at a good price too ; and, no doubt,<sup>the</sup> next thing would be that he would marry, and marry well. For in these days, when money is the chief good, and when a rich plebeian is of more account than a poor aristocrat, such a man as George Raymond is worth, in public opinion, a score of needy gentlefolks of the bluest blood.

Mr. O'Grady, poor old man, was only too anxious to leave the place that now be-

longed to the new man, but the long and severe illness that kept him a close prisoner to his room prevented his doing so. "As soon as ever I get well," he would say, "have all your things ready, Kitty." And so Kitty had all her things ready, and the furniture was sold, except a few absolutely necessary things; but anybody knew, and none better than Mr. Raymond, that poor Mr. O'Grady would only remove to one other, and that the last home of all—to the pretty country churchyard where, under the shade of the ancient yew-trees, so many of his kith and kin were sleeping.

The "new man," as the country folk chose to call Mr. Raymond, had bought another and a smaller property, "marching"—as the Scotch say—with Ballybroughy; and in order to "set things in order," and see that some extensive drainage works were being properly put in hand, he took up his abode at the one small inn that the village of Ballybroughy could boast of.

Mr. O'Grady had written a very cold, stiff, and formal letter, apologising for being compelled by illness to remain under a roof that was no longer his, and in reply had received almost as formal a note, in which George Raymond requested that Mr. O'Grady would consider Ballybroughy his as long as it suited him.

"Confound his impudence!" Desmond had cried, on the receipt of this letter, and at the writer had honestly meant all he said.

"Answer his note," said Mr. O'Grady, "and tell him I want to see him. There is that farm of Delaney's, I've promised to say a good word for him."

"Hang me if I do!" was Desmond's rude and ungracious reply. "Let Kitty write it. I know what sort of a fellow he is—a purse-proud upstart, standing in the shoes of better men."

So it was Kitty who had to write the note which her father, from gouty fingers, could not write. Mr. Raymond answered it in person. The old woman-servant showed him into a pretty room; that is, it would have been pretty but for a certain forlorn and dismantled appearance. "The master can't come down to-day, sir," said the old woman; "he's mighty bad, entirely. Miss Kitty will see you."

This put Mr. Raymond very much out, as the saying is. He was a man of methodical habits, and liked all things to be done with regularity. No woman, no girl could understand business.

The door opened, and a young girl entered; and at this sight—not such a very uncommon one, surely, in this hapless land,

where, as wise men tell us, the female element so greatly preponderates—all Mr. Raymond's carefully cherished ideas and opinions came to grief, and that happened which wise men tell us cannot happen, but which experience shows us does happen: he "fell in love" at first sight. This meant in his case, whatever it may mean in the case of others, that he was, for the first time in his life, suddenly convinced he now saw the one woman whom in the whole world he would wish to marry: whom he could live for—what was more (and it is no exaggeration in George Raymond's case to say so), whom he could die for. This love was to be the one thing of his life—to be a part of his very nature, and to rest with him till his death; it was to give him infinite pleasure, and also infinite pain. But these things were in the future. He only now was conscious of a strange, dim feeling of wonder and admiration.

Then (you must remember this man, my hero though he is, was no model of perfection) he began to recollect himself—to pull himself, as it were, together; and he made a stiff and ceremonious bow, when poor Kitty, to whom this formal gentleman was a formidable being, had tried to propitiate him by a smile and a little attempt at offering a timid hand.

"Won't you sit down, please?" she said, seating herself at the same time, and stirring up a great turf fire. "Poor papa can't see you. He's so sorry; he's very ill, I'm afraid, and quite unable to get out of bed. He's very sorry."

"So am I, I'm sure," said Mr. Raymond, feeling foolish enough. "Some other day, perhaps?"

"Here's a note he has just written," and now she produced one from her pocket. "He wants so much that the man who has had the farm should keep it, you see."

"So I understand, Miss O'Grady," said the man of business-like habits. "But he has no lease, and besides——"

"Don't say that, now," cried Kitty, in her momentary enthusiasm forgetting her many troubles, and giving Mr. Raymond the full benefit of a lovely smile. "When one says 'besides,' there's always something horrid coming."

"What I meant to say," pursued Mr. Raymond, coldly, for he was feeling as if his reason were falling a captive to a young girl just because she had blue eyes, and a lovely smile, "was just this: This man, in whom your father and you are interested, is, I hear, a *drunkard*. Now, you see——"

"Ah, the poor man!" said Kitty, with a look of pity that would have melted even good Father Mathew's heart. "Sue, he

does take too much, but he has a bad wife, and—”

“The wife drinks too, I hear,” said Mr. Raymond, calmly.

“Indeed, she does; and the children are all in rags, and I’m sure they have not enough to eat, often and often.”

“I don’t think you have a very strong case,” said he, with a smile, yet he felt angry. “A man who drinks, beats his wife—that is also true, I think?”

“But she deserves it,” cried Kitty.

“Granted. At all events, it seems: they are not steady, hard-working people, and the very best thing that could happen to them would be to send them out of the country.”

Kitty was silent; her face fell a little.

“If they were allowed to struggle on, or rather to exist—for it seems they *don’t struggle*—as they are now, those unlucky ragged children will just follow their example. No, I’ll root them out as soon as possible.”

“You will do as you please and what you please, of course,” she said, and now the smile was gone and she flashed a look at him that was anything but amiable. Then she turned, and without another word, resolutely looked out of the window. Mr. Raymond felt as if he were once more a schoolboy put “in the corner” for a delinquency; he came boldly out of it with the remark: “Ladies don’t quite understand such things. I assure you, Miss O’Grady, the false kindness would be in allowing the man to vegetate in sloth and drunkenness, with wretched children here, when he could have a chance of doing better in New York. He tells me he has a brother there.”

“He told papa—he told me that it would break his heart to live anywhere but here. I do believe, sir, you think poor men have no feelings.”

Mr. Raymond’s most dignified course would perhaps have been to have made a polite bow and retired, leaving his antagonist with the honours of war; but he had fallen, poor man—he did not know it—into a snare, whence easy escape was denied him. “For a time,” he said, “your friend Delaney, of course, is secure of staying where and as he is. Perhaps, had I guessed how warm an advocate he has here, I should not have determined to remove him; as it is, you must really pardon me, Miss O’Grady, if I tell you honestly that I think you rather mislead yourself in thinking he will break his heart if he gives up the ‘dear delights’ of a hovel in a bog, continual drunkenness, and the pleasure of breaking his wife’s head.”

“Now you are laughing at me, Mr. Raymond.”

“Certainly not. Heaven forbid! But I believe the man does not dislike the idea of emigrating; and certainly, whether he does or not, I shall not allow him to remain as a squatter on my land.”

“Then I may tell papa this? I’m sure he’ll be very sorry he troubled you about it at all—I’m very sorry, at all events.”

George Raymond thought that there was actual dismissal in her look, and he stood up; so did she.

“Look here, Miss O’Grady,” he said, after a moment’s hesitation. “Say nothing to your father, if you can help it, that will fret or annoy him; as I have told you, there is no immediate chance of Delaney’s being sent away. Allow me to reply to your father’s note, and please tell him from me that he will be doing me an honour by remaining here just as long as he pleases.”

Kitty’s pride rose in arms against this, and yet he meant and said it kindly, and she knew that she and hers were actually living in this man’s house, and must do so until—she dared not say, even to herself, what that “until” was to end in.

Mr. Raymond walked gravely along, as he left the great old house, his own now. He walked down the very long avenue that would be fair exceedingly in spring and summer, but was doleful enough now. He stopped for a moment to look round him, then pursuing his walk, he presently came to the great entrance gate guarded by a dilapidated lodge. As he did so, from a field close by three figures came out hastily, one leading a handsome colt by its halter; and the three men were all talking at one time, each at the very pitch of his voice, and as if (and no doubt he was) anxious to out-talk the others—three men making as much noise as if they were thirty, and all apparently in extremely bad tempers.

One of them, Desmond O’Grady, turned round, saw Mr. Raymond, and at once addressed him. “Good morning, Mr. Raymond; you are just in time. Sir, look at this colt and tell me what you think of him. Look at him—the best blood in the country, three-quarters thoroughbred, and this fellow says—”

“This fellow”—in other words, Mr. Jem Sullivan, a “Squireen,” or small, would-be gentleman—here broke in with—

“Fellow, indeed! Keep a civil tongue in your head, if you please, Mr. Desmond O’Grady of Ballybroughy;” then, as if remembering, and interrupting himself, he resumed, “But I’m forgetting—isn’t Mr.

O'Grady of Ballybroughy at all now; I believe I have the honour of addressing the real owner of Ballybroughy?"

Mr. Raymond, thus pointedly addressed, made a cold little bow, and said curtly, "I am Mr. Raymond; but allow me to say I know nothing about horses—nothing at all."

"Any man knows if a horse is lame or not," said Mr. James Sullivan, defiantly; "and what I say is, the colt is lame—dog lame! I suppose I have two eyes in my head?"

"You've a tongue in it, certainly," said young O'Grady, with a bitter laugh. "You know, just as well as I do, that I wouldn't warrant the colt—you took him for better for worse. As for the lameness, I know that isn't a bit of inatter; ask any one."

"You said he was sound," answered Mr. Sullivan. "He isn't. What more would ye have?"

"And you," replied young O'Grady, with a stamp, "said you were ready to take him the way he was. He wasn't lame when you got him, I'll take my oath of that."

"Hear that, now!" said the other, lifting up his hands, then turning to Mr. Raymond, "see him, Mr. Raymond. No man alive would take the horse. If he was sound—why, then you see—

"I suppose, my fine fellow, you want a thoroughbred colt like that, sound and warranted, for what you paid for him. That cock won't fight, Sullivan—the colt is yours, you must keep him."

Mr. James Sullivan folded his arms and looked at the young man from top to toe, then he said, "Try it—just you try it before any judge or jury. No twelve men would compel me to keep him. I'm quite willing to let it go before them, unless this gentleman here will decide between us."

"Look here, sir," said Mr. Raymond, sternly. "I told you I know nothing and want to know nothing about the matter. But it seems to me that if you've bought the house as it is, with all its faults and merits, you must stand by your bargain. That's the way we men of business settle our affairs."

"Right, sir," cried Desmond O'Grady. "Just what I say, and that's what he did. Didn't he, Mick?"

"Be this an' be that," said Mick (otherwise Michael Ryan), all in a heat, as it were, with honest and upright indignation, "but that flays the world. Me masther said nothin' at all o' the kind. And why should he? He took the colt with your warranty—not written, av coarse; for why? Beyant all doubt ye said as good that he was sound, and that he'd pass any vet. An'

any gentleman wouldn't expect him to take him when he's as lame as a crutch; it's only three legs he has!"

It was a lie, and he knew that he was lying, and so did his master, and young O'Grady knew it also. The fact being Sullivan had bought the colt, intending to pay for him at a cheap rate, Desmond O'Grady wanting the money badly; then he found out that he could get a cheaper or more useful horse, or he found out that he could not possibly find even the small sum that would purchase it. A man like James Sullivan had as many tricks as a monkey, as many holes as a fox, and quite as much cunning. Desmond O'Grady, hot-headed and wilful, was no match at all for him.

He was too angry to speak, and Sullivan said promptly, "Any gentleman would—just what I say," laying such a forcible emphasis on the noun that Desmond lost the very small remnant of control remaining to him, and caught him by the collar of the coat fiercely, saying—

"What do you mean by that?"

"Hands off!" cried Mr. Sullivan, staggering back from the swiftness and violence of the attack.

"Stop! for shame, Mr. O'Grady!" said George Raymond, interposing. "Don't, for pity's sake, make a fool of yourself," and with some actual force he released Mr. James Sullivan's coat from the angry grasp of the other.

"He'll murder me masther," cried Mick, vehemently. "Are ye hurt, sir? Are ye hurt, Misther James?"

"I'll hurt him worse than that," said Desmond O'Grady, furiously, as he tried to free himself from Mr. Raymond's strong hands uselessly.

"He can't make a fool of himself," said Sullivan, drawing breath, and with an attempt at a laugh of disdain, "for the best reason in the world—he's one already."

"Mr. Sullivan—if that's your name," said George Raymond, putting himself between the two angry men—"I think you must see that your language and manner are uselessly provoking. Whatever the cause of this quarrel may be, this is no time to discuss it. Mr. O'Grady, will you come with me? Some other time you may be able to arrange matters."

"I'm a fool, am I?" said Desmond O'Grady. "Perhaps so, Mr. James Sullivan; but I'll remember this to you, you may take your oath of that. Some time I'll catch you when there's nobody by to save you—the sooner the better." Then he turned to the groom, who stood by holding the horse, and expressing

indignant remonstrance in every line of his cunning face.

"Take him up to the house," said Desmond, trying rather unsuccessfully to speak calmly, "and leave him with one of the boys in the yard; and don't let me see your ugly face again here."

"I'll leave him wid yer sarvint, sir," said Michael Ryan, "and glad to have done wid him, I am."

Mr. Sullivan hesitated a little. It was not very convenient for him to keep up this quarrel with young O'Grady. Poor as the latter was, there was a prestige in knowing him; he was one of the "county people" into whose ranks young Sullivan dare not count himself. Though Ballybrophy was no longer theirs, yet the very name was something. So he made an awkward attempt to "hide the rent with a darn," always a difficult thing to do—in this case impossible. Desmond O'Grady wanted the money; he felt that he was being over-reached by the other; he was ashamed at Mr. Raymond being a witness to the scene, and he despised himself almost as much as he despised Mr. James Sullivan.

"There's no need—none in the world," said the latter, "for us two falling out. Everybody knows a man may change his mind. And it wasn't as if the colt was bought—not even the luck-penny was paid. Shake hands, old chap, and the next dealing we have may be better."

"I'll have no more dealings with you, Mr. James Sullivan," said the young man, with a bent brow and an angry look. "You as good as said I was a cheat; you broke the bargain, and your word too. And you had better take care," he added, advancing close to Mr. Sullivan, "that I don't catch you when you're not thinking, and then I'll pay you off."

"Why, then 'twould be a queer thing if I was not able for you, any day of the week," said the Squireen; but he took care to step backwards as he spoke, and feeling that with these valiant words he could cover his retreat, he walked off with his hands in his pockets, calling out to his servant to be sure and give "Mr. O'Grady's horse up to Mr. O'Grady's own man." There was a Parthian shot in this, for the time had passed by when the Ballybrophy stable held troops of horses, and when the stable-yards were crowded with grooms and "handy-men."

"If you're coming my way," said Mr. Raymond, when Sullivan had disappeared, "I'll be glad of your company. Don't fret yourself, I advise you, about that little matter."

Desmond walked on moodily, his hands in his pockets, resenting advice, yet needing it—neither man nor boy, hot-headed and wilful, and without restraint or guidance; his face was not a peasant one to look upon, handsome as it was. "I'll have it out with that fellow yet!" he said, as much to himself as to his companion, who, however, answered him.

"Mr. O'Grady," he said, "if I may give you a bit of advice, will you take it?"

"I suppose I *must*," said the young fellow, with scanty courtesy enough.

"No. There need be no '*must*' in the case; but I'm almost old enough to be your father—anyway, old enough to have seen more of the world and its people than you have. Take my advice, then, and if you *must* have such friends as that man, be careful how you deal with them."

"By George, sir! if Jemmy Sullivan heard you, he'd knock you down," said Desmond O'Grady, who in his bitter hour felt angry with all the world—Mr. Raymond included—and who, perversely, would now take up the cudgels for the man with whom he had just been longing to fight.

Sensible man as he was, cool and good-tempered too, yet Mr. Raymond felt a little nettled at this speech. He said coldly, "No; he certainly wouldn't do *that*."

"Why? He'd try it, for one thing."

"Granted; but what's the use of this idle bragging? Mr. Sullivan certainly will not try it. If he did, Mr. O'Grady, I rather think he'd find me an ugly customer. We men of the North, you know, are used to take care of ourselves."

Glancing at the speaker, young O'Grady could not but allow that there was good sense and truth in his assertion. Though no longer a young man, George Raymond was tall and well-made, with a broad chest, head well set up, and a look of decision and vigour that spoke of temperance and of a regular life. "Why, I thought you fellows up there cared for nothing but your mills, and your factories, and your money—very different from what we care about."

This was a case, Mr. Raymond saw, for a little wholesome tonic, the more unpalatable the better, and he said, "Different? Well, yes, certainly. If I were as young as you, I should not care for your mode of life. I should not care for such associates as this Mr. Sullivan. I should not spend my time in such places as *that*," pointing to a little public-house that stood within sight. "I should use the senses and the limbs and the talent that Heaven had given me, and I should make a way and a fortune for myself."

"What way? What sort of fortune?"

said Desmond. "Unless I enlist, I see no other way."

"Better do so than spend the best part of one's days in useless idleness or worse—a soldier has to work very hard, I assure you," and then, with a little formal bow, George Raymond went on his way, leaving Desmond O'Grady to take a path through the fields that would eventually bring him home.

### CHAPTER III.

#### KITTY'S FIRST BALL.

 LD Mr. O'Grady was dying, but he would not let it be said that he was. The doctor could do nothing for him. "When the fine, soft weather comes," said the poor old man, "and when we're able to get away from this, my mind will be easier. You'll see that I'll get strong."

As for moving him anywhere, that was out of the question. So in the house that was his no longer he lay quietly enough, sometimes cross and almost savage, sometimes looking forward to the "fine, soft weather, when he would be easier." Poor old man! The spring would come, and with it the lovely flowers and the new leaves on the gaunt old trees, but he would not be there. Still, he would not believe that he was in danger, and Kitty, like most girls, was only too glad to fall into the same train of ideas. This she did the more easily, for the doctor, a good man—not a Solomon, but a tender-hearted old soul—absolutely shrank from telling her the whole truth about her father.

Kitty went into her father's room one morning with his late breakfast and a couple of letters. She was quite ready to believe him when he said he was "as fresh as a daisy, and felt quite himself again."

"And you look so well," cried the girl, fondling his thin, white hair. "I do think that the last bottle the doctor gave you was a good one. Sure, you've been better since you took it. And here are two letters for you; I'll just open the window and you can read them."

Old as he was, those fine blue eyes (all his race had splendid eyes) needed no spectacles. He opened his letters with his white, thin fingers, and looked first at one, and then at the other. "These are about you, Kitty," he said. "A fine card from Lord Enniskean; he and I were good friends when he was Lord Rathkele. Dear, dear! what times those were, to be sure!"

"A card!" cried Miss Kitty, her blue eyes

as wide open as possible, and a red flush, that you couldn't buy in any chemist's shop, rising to her cheek. "An invitation to a ball! Three weeks off?"

"Of course," said her father, who knew more of the ways of the great world than Kitty did. "Mr. O'Grady, Mr. Desmond O'Grady, and Miss O'Grady? Very civil of Rathkele—of Lord Enniskean, I mean. You'll go, child?"

Kitty clapped her hands and absolutely danced for joy. She had never been at a ball in her life. This was the first radiant idea; but the moment after came that cold "after-thought," the little bitter drop in the sweet cup. "I can't go, daddy," she said, "that's positive; it's a pity, but I can't."

"Nonsense! fiddlesticks!" said the old man, roughly. "Pray, why can't you? Times are changed indeed when my child can't figure at a dance with the best of them. We've no money now to speak of, to be sure, and we've no home either; but it would be hard for you to lose the chance of a little fun."

On Kitty's brow sat a grave air of doubt and trouble. It *was* tempting, this chance. How gay and glorious looked the big card with its polite, formal wording, "At home—Dancing!" A halo seemed to surround the words; but, alas! dull reality came between her and the dazzling vision. "It wouldn't do, papa," she said slowly, and in the more commonplace form of address. "Daddy" was kept for special use and occasion.

"Do! Why not? I tell you, Catherine, you *must* go. There's Desmond, poor boy! He wants a friend—Lord Enniskean could help him. You've never seen anybody at all lately. I'd like my girl to be able to show herself—you must go."

When Mr. O'Grady spoke in this manner everybody had to be silent. Kitty knew that contradiction was just what he could not endure; and yet, the first delightful, ravishing hope having passed away, a more serious and dreary commonplace consideration presented itself. Girl as she was, Kitty knew only too well the changed circumstances of her father's position. Was it well or seemly for her to go to balls and parties when they were actually living under a roof not their own? Then her father was ill—not that either she or he thought he was hopelessly, or even dangerously so, but crippled and ailing; and last, not least—for Kitty was a woman, and very keenly alive to the dear delights of wearing a gay new gown or any bit of dainty finery—she had "nothing to wear." How mighty fine every one would be there! Silks and satins of the grandest, and laces

and velvets, while my poor Kitty's best, very best dress was one that had been made for her three years since, and which was shabby and much too small and too short for her pretty round body and for the existing fashion. While all the Ladies Rathkele would be as "fine as two pins," it would never, never do for Kitty to go like Cinderella before the fairy godmother came on the scene.

"You must go!" said her father; and very early does a girl, if she be worth her salt, learn the lesson of her sex, unselfishness. Kitty would not let her father see the trouble and doubt that arose in her mind as to this beautiful coming ball.

"And what am I to wear?" thought she, as she left her father to enjoy his breakfast.

Lady's-maid she had none. Old Peggy, the housemaid, who was parlour-maid too, and who had been Kitty's nurse, "hooked and unhooked her," as women say, when that operation had to be performed; and Peggy was just then crossing the lobby with a great armful of clean linen, to place it in the huge press that stood in one corner. And how fragrant was that linen—it had been spread on the Southern drying-ground, and bleached and aired under the winter's sun. Peggy was justly proud of that linen. Fine old double-damask cloths—darned, most of them, and worn, but splendid "double-damask," all the same; fine lawn pillow-slips, edged with thread lace—many a London lady would have envied them. To Peggy did the girl address herself—poor Peggy, the trusty servant and friend.

"Peggy, I want the key of the old wardrobe."

"What for, in the name of goodness? All the odds and ends are in it, and a world's wonder of rubbish."

"No matter, Peggy, open it for me."

"Wait a bit till I set these things in the press," said Peggy. She could refuse her young mistress nothing. She laid by the white, sweet-smelling burden, and followed Kitty to "the blue room." This had been the best bedroom when there were guests at Ballybroughy; it was a large apartment with dim blue hangings. There was a chill air about it, and their steps sounded almost with ghostly echo as mistress and maid crossed over to where the old wardrobe stood.

Peggy unlocked it. Odds and ends there were—thrown there to be handy in case of the removal that must sooner or later take place. Nothing at all of Kitty's was there in it, and Peggy grunted her disapproval as the girl twisted out one bundle and

opened another. Desperate cases demand desperate remedies. Kitty had not the ghost of a chance of a new dress for this ball. She had determined to try if fortune would enable her to make some sort of wearable thing out of the *olla-podrida* that remained of the wardrobes of dead and gone aunts and grandmothers. She knew there was nothing very valuable, but there might be some piece or pieces—something that needle and thread and "the use of the smoothing-iron," as Peggy suggested, might make available.

What odd things she did turn out and turn up! old satin shoes, so narrow that the ladies' feet of the time of the Four Georges must have been much slimmer than they are now; broken fans, still with bright colours; faded satin waistcoats; an old coat with a stupendous collar; and a piece of blue brocade, very fine blue brocade indeed—faded in some places, but with a respectable quantity still fresh and splendid.

"That will make a darling cover for the old chair below, miss," said Peggy, with an admiring gasp.

"Old chair, indeed!" said Kitty. "It will make a dress, or part of a dress, for a young girl. Lovely! What a providential thing!"

"It is not good for much," says Peggy. "Here's a bit with the colour faded, an' there's hardly more nor five yards of it good."

"Good or bad, it will do for me; and there's nothing else here I want. Tidy it up, Peggy, like a good old soul; and I'll want you to do a little job for me this evening."

"You can't make a gown out o' that," says Peggy, with the air of one who knew all about it.

"Look," said Kitty, laying the piece of brocade on the bed. "I'll make a bodice out o' that—it will be lovely—and trim it with lace; and as for the skirt—why, you must help me with that."

"A body one thing, an' the tail another," said Peggy. "Glory to ye, Miss Kitty, ye'd be like a play-acthor!"

"Nonsense; you don't know anything about the fashion. Look here, you must wash my old muslin skirt—not tail, Peggy—and make it up beautifully, and I'll wear it with the blue bodice; and I have my pearl necklace, and there is the fan with the peacock's feathers. You'll see, Peggy, I'll come out as fine as fine."

"Shure, I'll pluck the ould paycock," said Peggy, "if ye want any of his feathers."

"If you'll wash the muslin skirt," said

Kitty, "it will do ; and, any way, the blue will suit me." Old fashions come round, and youth has a blessed alchemy of its own that can make all things becoming and suitable.

Peggy promised and vowed to "make-up" and clear-starch the India muslin as good as new ; and when Kitty went into her father's room an hour after the rummaging of the old press, her face wore the calm and radiant look of a general who anticipates victory, or of a Q.C. who knows he has the "court with him."

"And what about your gown for the ball?" asked Mr. O'Grady, coming at last to the question that Kitty had thought of almost at first. He asked it doubtfully, almost sadly. He could not give his pretty child a handsome cheque to buy herself a new outfit.

"I shall wear blue—blue and white," she said, with dignity ; "blue brocade and India muslin, and pearls."

"And will that be the thing?"

"Never you fear, daddy," said the girl ; "it will be lovely !" and she counted on her fingers how many precious hours she should have for the requisite stitching.

Happy, golden time of youth, when even work, the curse that descended long ago, can be changed into a pleasure !

As for Desmond O'Grady, from the first he refused to "have anything to do with the thing." Plead as Kitty might, he stuck to his resolution. He was just at that age when a lad doesn't much care for the pranks of society—by-and-by, perhaps, not now.

A first ball ! Kitty dreamt of it. It happened that Mr. O'Grady was having one of his "good spells," when nature seemed to make a rally, and appetite and sleep came back to him ; and but for that strange and constant inability to move hand or foot, he would have seemed, as the country folk called it, "on the mend." Peggy set to work with a will, and the India muslin that had been Kitty's mother's wedding gown in the time of short waists and short skirts was washed and spread on the Southern sloping drying-ground, and Peggy declared that it would come out of the ordeal "good as new." If that old muslin had a tongue, it could have told you queer romantic tales of the far-away world where the Benares workman plied his rude loom ever so long ago, of the ship that had come half round the world with the fragile web as part of its cargo, of the pretty Irish bride who had worn it on that first day of her too brief married life.

Kitty was wont to boast that if she was not very clever at other accomplishments,

at least she knew how to use her needle, and the blue bodice was to be a masterpiece.

About this time Mr. Raymond found himself once more paying a visit at Ballybrophy. It was odd enough—the house was his, yet the old owners still lived in it. George Raymond had made this matter an easy one by his plain common-sense, and by a certain kindly sincerity that there could be no doubting. When the old man explained that his sudden illness had compelled him still to abide under a roof that was, in actual point of law, not his at all, Mr. Raymond set his anxieties at rest by assuring him that just as long as he chose to remain at Ballybrophy, so long would it please Mr. Raymond to know that he was there. "For," the new owner said, "I have no intention of residing there, Mr. O'Grady, and have no intention either of finding a tenant for it."

Kitty accepted Mr. Raymond's kind words ; he was quite old, she thought, and she thought of him as a girl thinks of one who is very much older than she is.

"Of course you are not going to the ball?" she said. They were pretty good friends now ; she had got to like his visits rather, for visitors were few at Ballybrophy, and he had studied human nature long enough, and was clever enough, to be entertaining and agreeable.

"The ball at Lord Enniskean's? I'm not a party-goer—too old for it," said Mr. Raymond.

"I'm going," said Miss Kitty, in triumph.

"With whom, pray? Surely your father is too ill."

"Oh, never fear," she said. "I'm to have a regular what-d'ye-call-them—a regular chaperon. Madam Bourke will sleep here, and I am to go with her."

"Mrs. Bourke, of Castle Bourke, you mean?"

"She is called, and we call her 'Madam,'" said Miss Kitty, with dignity, and Mr. Raymond smiled involuntarily. He knew perfectly well how much right "Madam" had to the title.

Kitty noticed the smile, and got angry. "It will be delightful," she said. "I have not been at a ball before, but Madam Bourke knows everybody, and I am sure of getting lots of partners, though I shall not dance with everybody, of course."

"Who do you mean by 'everybody'?"

"Oh, butchers, and bakers, and candlestick makers!" she said, laughing. "Lord Enniskean is the county member, and must be everyone."

"Your partners will have their coats-of-arms, and possibly their genera-

logical trees with them, in their pockets," he said crossly, and he *could* be cross sometimes. He was a man of method—of hard and fast rules. What—what had "come over him," as they say, that he should be sitting here—he, the middle-aged, sensible, practical man, talking "small talk" with a girl who looked down on him? Looked down on him, no doubt, just because she had a long string of "O'Grady" ancestors to boast of. At this moment he ought to be looking over those improvements of his, with his Scotch steward; instead, here he was, talking nonsense!

"Rubbish," laughed Kitty. "I never saw or heard of a man who carried a tree in his pocket." She was an ignorant little goose, no doubt, but Mr. Raymond could not help smiling, in spite of his vexation.

"I mean," he said, "you'll dance only with what fine ladies call their own set. Oh, I know enough of their jargon to know that much."

"I'll dance with those I like best," was her reply. "But I suppose such a thing as a dance seems to you a foolish idea?"

"Is there anything very nice in it, Miss O'Grady?"

"Perhaps not. But oh, I wish—I do wish the time would pass away! I wish this was the night of it. I hope papa will be ever so well, and that my dress may be the very prettiest there, as I mean it to be." Then she checked herself. This cold, grave man, what could he know or care about balls, or dances, or dress? "Are you going to it?" she said demurely. He hesitated, the fact being that at that very moment he had a letter in his pocket written to refuse my Lord Enniskean's invitation. Then he said, "Dances are not much in my way, Miss O'Grady. Suppose I should go, and be bold enough to ask you to dance—I say *suppose*, you know—would you think me very foolish?"

"You *do* dance, then. Somehow, I didn't suppose you could," said Kitty, a little too frankly, but she left his question unanswered.

"I suppose I could walk through a quadrille, nothing else; as to going round like a teetotum, that's beyond me."

"Then," she said, "stay at home, I advise you; it would be very dull to have to stand looking on, and everybody else happy."

"Do you mean to say that nobody can be happy unless they can waltz, or polka, or go round some way? Well, well, and they call women reasonable beings!"

They were at ~~other~~ purposes. Kitty, poor ~~old~~, was elated at the prospect of this

bit of pleasure, and the middle-aged man felt, as if the gulf between them were visibly and surely widening. Men exaggerate their age and think young girls consider them venerable patriarchs, whereas the truth is women like men who are greatly their seniors.

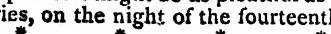
"Reasonable! Certainly; and no doubt you'll enjoy yourself at home reading your newspaper. Every one to his fancy, as the old woman said when she kissed her cow."

"I see you are determined to think that my going would be absurd, and perhaps you're right." And then he said good-bye, rather to Kitty's relief. She was longing to get back to her work. Already that blue bodice was assuming the correct shape and air. "Real brocade, too!" thought the girl; and Mr. O'Grady heard from time to time of the progress of the work, and was pleased therat. "The child will have one bit of pleasure," thought the old man, with a sigh. Work, and trouble, and loss would come with the coming years. They must just live on their slender means in some quiet country town, or at some watering-place, when they left Ballybropy. But now Kitty would go to the ball, and ruffle it with the best, and would, as the poor old man thought, be the best-looking girl in the room—ay, though my Ladies Rathkele might put on all their bravery.

And George Raymond thought this too, as he walked home. He took the letter of refusal from his pocket and tore it up, then in his clear, rather business-like hand wrote another, this time accepting "the kind invitation of the Earl of Enniskean for the fourteenth instant." Another epistle went by the same post to a celebrated Dublin tailor, ordering a suit of the regulation, raven-coloured clothes in which the gentlemen of our time go to merry-makings.

"I am a fool, and an *old* fool!" he said to himself; but the letters went, all the same.

And Kitty stitched away at the blue bodice and thought it "lovely;" yet more than once she could not help thinking that she had been rather "short" in her manner to Mr. Raymond. He was very good and kind, and somehow the time passed away pleasantly when he came to Ballybropy, "though I think we're always fighting," thought Kitty—"always. I suppose he thinks me a regular scold." And she put in a dainty little lace tucker, and breathed a fervent prayer that partners might be as plentiful as blackberries, on the night of the fourteenth.



The day came at last. Did ever day linger so long on its way? And with it came Madam Bourke, Kitty's chaperon. She drove over from Castle Bourke, not in the broken-down, ramshackle machine that the tellers of Irish stories select as being the only one to be found in Ireland, not a bit of it. Madam made her appearance in a small brougham, drawn by a stout, well-fed, and well-groomed horse, and though the Jehu would have looked shabby and countrified in Hyde Park, he was neither a scarecrow nor a living skeleton.

The little lady herself (she was short and plump) looked as if her grief for the defunct "Count," her husband, had not much injured her health. Well-dressed too, if a little youthfully, in strong, good silk and thread lace and cosy furs. Oh! I promise you that Madam took good care of herself. The stout horse would rest all day, and then, refreshed with oats, would convey Madam and Kitty to the ball.

Providence was good to them, the girl felt; there was neither frost nor snow, and a trifle of rain does nobody any harm.

Madam's visit caused some stir at Ballybrophy. Her room had to be well warmed and aired, and Peggy saw to that; and a couple of fat pullets died an early death; and some good wine was sent for, for the time was gone by when the Ballybrophy cellars held store of the best vintages. And Madam paid the old gentleman a formal visit in his dressing-room, where she found him sitting propped up in a great shabby arm-chair, with his white hair newly brushed by Kitty's hands, and his fine, well-bred face looking very thin and pale.

Madam was a good little soul, in spite of some faults and a good many affectations, and her kind heart was touched when she saw how ill he looked. Kitty was not present at that interview. Half an hour afterwards Madam came out of the room with red eyes; but a woman can always whip on her armour, and she was ready to vow that "she thought him looking wonderfully, and so pleased to know that the ball was to be a good one, and that Kitty would enjoy it; so look your best, child," she said, "and I'll have the pleasure of telling him you were the prettiest girl in the room." And this brought a good touch of red to Miss Kitty's face, which was better than all the rouge in the world.

Imagine, then, if you please, my heroine equipped for conquest. The narrow, black-framed, cracked looking-glass told her that the blue brocade and delicate

muslin made up a most charming dress. Imagine the drive over, through muddy roads and up the long avenue, and then — fairyland! What better word for it? — for those corridors, lit up and warmed and decked with ferns and palms; for the large rooms that were crowded with masses of lovely women and charming men (or so thought my Kitty); for the changing colours and the delicate perfume, and the flash of scarlet and gold from the uniforms of the officers who were amongst the guests? Madam Bourke felt the girl's hand tremble on her arm, but Madam did not tremble, not she.

Kitty would have been pretty anywhere, dressed "anyhow." In the blue brocade, with real pearls and a cloud of delicate muslin, she was more than pretty. My lord and his eldest daughter received the guests. Kitty knew a good many of them, some were strangers to her. All that silk and lace, and a good dressmaker, and powder (and perhaps rouge) could do, had been done for the Ladies Rathkele, who had their gowns from Worth, and who were considered to be perfect in the art of decorating themselves. And they looked very well, and naturally were surrounded by troops of aspirants, all pressing for this or that dance.

A quadrille! Kitty didn't think much of quadrilles, but they were better than nothing. All in a flutter—the flutter of a first ball—she sat, apparently demure and composed, by Madam Bourke. The band began to utter strange little squeaks and squeals; people were beginning to take partners. Kitty wondered when *her* turn would come.

How splendid were those scarlet-clad warriors! Here came two, handsome and jolly-looking. One of them stopped to speak to Madam Bourke. Certainly, thought Miss Kitty, he means to ask me to dance. Here came another gentleman, rather a foil to the magnificent soldiers—a figure in the undertaker - looking, black evening-dress of the period, grave, quiet, middle-aged, and Mr. Raymond asked the honour of Miss O'Grady's hand for the quadrille.

Kitty's card was blank, but she was determined to give this dance to the sp'endid-looking dragoon—he meant to ask her, she felt.

She lifted her eyes to Mr. Raymond's face. "Not *this* quadrille, I think," she said.

"Are you engaged for it already?" he asked in his direct manner. In all his life this man had never condescended to an equivocation or a deceit.

"I may not dance it. I haven't made up my mind. I'll give you another, if you like," she replied, with a *disraite* look and manner; and then—oh, joy!—she saw Mr. Raymond no more, for there was the scarlet and gold warrior bowing before her, and being introduced by Madam.

"This quadrille? with pleasure." So her little hand is laid on that wonderful red sleeve, and Kitty goes off for her first dance at her first ball. Mr. Raymond saw the whole thing; but there was no fear of his lacking partners—everybody knew that he was a person to be "cultivated" and made much of, that he had bought a fine estate, and that his money, to say nothing of other advantages, made him the equal of the lack-lands of the neighbourhood.

That dance ended, others succeeded. Kitty had been complimented and flattered, and had taken both gifts with the open-hearted sincerity of a girl at her first ball.

A little uneasy, perhaps conscience-stricken, more than once Mr. Raymond's eyes met hers—in his a glance of reproach. Somehow she felt she had treated him unworthily.

Another quadrille! Well, here was the name of that glorious being in red and gold down on her card for *that*; and Kitty was glad. He was the best-looking man in the room, and had *half* told her that she was the one and only person he cared to dance with. But Kitty looked up anxiously from where she sat by Madam's side. Mr. Raymond was not dancing; he stood near, apparently looking at the gay throng—in reality seeing nothing but Kitty's face.

The quadrille was about to commence. Alas! the glorious being had forgotten all about my heroine—he passed her by, with one of the Ladies Rathkele on his arm; and Kitty, who was no fool, saw by his averted eye that his forgetfulness was not at all an accident. Miss Kitty had begun to learn a sharp but useful lesson that is taught in the ball-room very often.

"Will you give me *this* quadrille?" and she looked up, and again it was Mr. Raymond.

"She took his arm, and off they went. When the dance ended they passed into the conservatory, where the painted lamps seemed to imitate the gay exotics. "Will you forgive me?" asked Kitty, suddenly, almost humbly; and without another word, just a smile from him, she knew that she was forgiven.

Then came more dances. The evening ended, as all evenings end. Had it been a "success"? Kitty did not ask herself that question. She was tired, she would be

glad to rest. She was silent. Her brain was giddy from the heat, the glow, the music. At the end it was George Raymond who waited and saw her wrapped up and seated by Madam Bourke in the little brougham.

And Lady Emma, who would have no objection in the world to leave the grandeur of a very impecunious household for the comforts of such an establishment as Mr. Raymond's wife would have, could not persuade him to stay "for the last dance." "Oh, do, please," and so forth. Mr. Raymond politely declined. It was late, he must go.

So Kitty drove home with Madam, along the muddy, wintry roads, and got safely to bed, and fell asleep, and dreamt that she was dancing on the top of a drum made of ice-cream and trifles.

## CHAPTER IV.

### DARK REALITY.

 T was a still evening. The earth seemed dead, not asleep; the sky was dark and heavy. Only in the west there was an odd yellow light, where the setting sun had left some of his splendour. Decay and sadness seemed to hover about all things. You could hardly look forward hopefully to the bright spring.

Kitty wandered along, treading on the sodden leaves, sometimes startling a blackbird from the dry branches, sometimes seeing a brown hare fit swiftly across her path.

What sound was that? A shot? Desmond had been out with his gun. Perhaps he would bring home some game. How calm everything was! How strange the clouds looked, with that yellow light on them! She wandered on, late as it was. Her father would not need her; the house was lonely and dull, and the air, though heavy, refreshed her tired senses. She walked down the long avenue, hardly caring whither she went, thinking a good deal of the last night's wonderful pleasures. Had it all been pleasure? At least it was worth remembering, that short space of colouring, and music, and sweet words, and flattering looks. And with these thoughts came a kinder, gentler one—perhaps, too, a gravef. How good Mr. Raymond was! Then came another prudent thought, "And the blue brocade will do again." My poor Kitty! Pounds, shillings, and pence were things of very serious importance to her.

What cry is that? Almost the saddest

and most weird that anybody could utter. It was the "keen," or death-cry. Who was dead? The doleful cry rang in her ears as she slowly retraced her steps, for the night shadows were gathering, and over the valley a storm-mist was creeping—a mist that somehow took odd shapes and queer, ghastly, funereal shadows. Kitty was in low spirits, as girls often are when a quiet day succeeds a rapturous evening of excitement. There was little indeed in her circumstances to make her very cheerful. Very soon, as she thought, she would be saying good-bye to Ballybropy—shabby, tumble-down Ballybropy, to be sure, but every stick and stone was dear to her. Its very dulness and shabbiness were more precious than the smart furniture and new paint of other places.

Desmond was not at home when she entered the house. That did not surprise her; he was given to staying out late. She crept softly upstairs—the shabby stairs, with their faded carpet. Mr. O'Grady was asleep in his great arm-chair, and Kitty, after a cautious peep, gently closed the door. Poor girl! The great clock that stood like a sentinel in the hall seemed to tick with a most unusual loneliness; the lamp that Peggy had just lit seemed to give but a dim and ghastly light.

Kitty was to eat her dinner in solitary state; the old man ate his bit of chicken or mutton chop at odd hours, when his invalid's appetite required, and Desmond did not make his appearance.

"Where is Desmond?" The old man, waking after his nap, asked this question. He liked to hear the news—the little bit of gossip of the neighbourhood, the small events of the day. But Desmond never came. Peggy, who was of the watchful order, and who looked on Mr. Desmond as a "boy," hovered about the house, candle in hand, "with an eye on the clock," as she said, that she might let in Master Desmond when he came home. But home he never came; and the long, dark hours of night came on and passed by, and the tardy dawn of winter stole into the sky, and Kitty lay asleep, losing in a world of dreams the realities of the previous day.

When the sun was shining fully, Peggy came into Kitty's room. She just stirred in her sleep, awoke, and looked at the old woman. The next moment she started up with a cry, "Has Desmond 'come home?' what's the matter, Peggy?" For there was that in Peggy's white face that made Kitty feel that something *was* the matter.

"Master Desmond hasn't come home, miss," said Peggy, "an' we dunno where he is, an' maybe he'll never come back; an'

Mr. Sullivan was found dead last evening—shot to death, miss!"

"Peggy! Peggy!" cried the girl, starting up, and changing colour, while her heart beat wildly, "you don't know what you're saying."

"'Tis the blessed truth; they kem across the body close by the bog, an' there he was, dead an' could—shot dead."

And then Kitty, catching the old woman's wrinkled hand, whispered a question, "Who shot him, Peggy?"

"Nobody knows, glory be to goodness! He was dead as a harrin' when the boys from Kilmorrey kem across him."

The colour came back to Kitty's face. "Poor man!" she said, with the indifference of one who hears of some ill-hap to somebody who is a stranger. "But where is Desmond? why didn't he come home? has he got into any trouble, Peggy?"

Peggy shook her head. "Mavrone," she said solemnly, "sorra one of me knows. I tould a black lie to the master, and maybe Father Denis won't make me pay for that same. 'Is Masther Desmond come home?' says he. 'Shure he did,' says I, to his face, 'but I suppose he went out early wid his gun.' An' you must jest say the same, miss, for the master is weak an' ill, an' if he knows that Masther Desmond never kem last night he'd be frettin' about him. But the ould dog sot howlin' an' cryin' all night long, an' it's my thinkin' that we'll none of us see poor Masther Desmond again."

"He may have gone somewhere—he may have spent the night with a friend," said Kitty, but her words sounded strangely in her own ears. Yet though trouble and sorrow were close at hand, the daily routine must be gone through.

She dressed herself, and tried to make her young face wear the proper expression of easy cheerfulness when she went to pay her morning visit to her father. He had slept better, only he did not seem to get stronger; it was going to be a fine day; and why didn't they tie up the old black pointer? she had howled all through the night.

"I think she *was* tied up, daddy," said Kitty.

"And Desmond didn't come home till late last night? and he's out again now. Tell him, when he does come in, I want to see him. And I'll tell the doctor when he comes that he must contrive some way of getting me out. Mr. Raymond is very kind; but, after all, this is his house now—the sooner I'm out of it the better."

As if mentioning the name had acted as

a sort of spell, George Raymond was at that moment entering at the hall-door. He sent a message to ask if Miss O'Grady could see him for a few moments.

"Go and see him, child," said the old man, and Kitty went downstairs.

"Has your brother come home?" That was Mr. Raymond's first question.

"No," said Kitty. "Why do you ask?"

"Because it may be important to him and to you to know where he is, and what he was doing yesterday. Look here," he said gently, "the fact is, there has been a bad accident—a man has been found dead, and there were questions asked about your brother. I came here as soon as I could, to warn you and him. Don't faint now, for pity's sake," he said, with all a man's horror of such an event. "You'll want all your senses about you."

"I never fainted in my life," said Kitty. "What am I to do? What is this you mean?"

"Listen now, and don't be too much alarmed. A man called James Sullivan was found dead last evening. That he died from a gun-shot wound is certain; also there are bruises on his body. No gun has been found with him, and therefore suicide is out of the question," and then he stopped.

"I see; they think he was murdered."

"Nothing is certain. It was getting quite dark, and rain had been falling, and he was found quite in or close to the bog, so that traces of the accident were lost. Do you follow me?"

Kitty nodded, speak she could not.

"Of the three men who found and carried him home, none know exactly, or can quite remember now, the spot where he was lying. You know what a bog is," continued he, impatiently, stirred greatly by sympathy and pity for her—"one part the same as another"—water, mud, little tufts of grass. Of course they ought to have left him there, and sent for somebody who would have recognised the exact spot; but they carried the body home, and when the police came they had to wait till daylight to try and discover some trace of the accident. Now your brother's name has been mentioned: the coroner will hold an inquest to-day. Where is your brother? It is most important that we should know."

Kitty was able to whisper, "Do they suspect him?"

"I am afraid they do; there has been ill-will between them. Even the police know that. Then there is the fact of your brother threatening the other; and now Sullivan is found dead from loss of blood from a gun-shot wound, and your brother

was out shooting yesterday. We must look at the matter in this light."

"It will kill my father," said poor Kitty to herself.

Desmond O'Grady had been out shooting—a score of people were ready to prove that. His gun stood now in its accustomed place; but when it had been placed there, or by whom, nobody could tell. He must have come very quietly home, laid by the gun, and then gone out again: that much, and no more, was certain.

"He will come back," said Kitty, looking into George Raymond's face for the hope and confidence she did not feel.

"He will be mad unless he does. Now, you are a brave girl—be prepared for what may be said and done. Take care that your father does not hear it—too soon." For Mr. Raymond knew better than she did that sooner or later Mr. O'Grady must know all.

"You are very good and kind," she said; and Mr. Raymond felt that he could ask no better reward.

"I am going now to the inquest," he said, "and shall see you again. Depend on me. If you hear anything of your brother, let me know. You must be very cautious and very silent," and then he went away, leaving poor Kitty very desolate and almost stunned with this new, strange blow.

\* \* \* \*

The inquest was at an end. It was with difficulty that Mr. Raymond found this out when he arrived, so loud and hot was the debate.

What was the verdict? "Found dead, evidently from gun-shot and other wounds: how received there was not evidence to show."

Mr. Raymond drew a long breath of relief. He could listen now, and listen he did, as well as he could when a dozen voices were shouting to him. The Coroner, a grave person, drew him a little aside. "Can't ye give the gentleman room, ye omadhauins?" he said, clearing a way for himself and Mr. Raymond.

The men fell back, and the Coroner took George Raymond into a corner. "It's over," he said, "and a good thing too. Lucky that the jury were all of the O'Grady faction—all friends to Mister Desmond."

"I think their verdict a very just one," said Mr. Raymond, coldly.

"Yes, yes, sir. Of course it was according to their oath; but the Sullivans have been talking, and they have put it about that Mister Desmond has had a finger in the matter. They can do no harm, I.

suppose—a verdict is a verdict; and nobody saw Mister Desmond next or near the place, that's one thing. Sorry I'd be to have a hair of his head suffer. Sure, was not it the old gentleman got me into the place I have?"

"I see no earthly reason," said Mr. Raymond, "for drawing anybody into the question. If the verdict is as you say, there need be no discussion."

But the Coroner was not to be shut up so easily.

"Well, sir, we all know the question could be opened again—any further evidence; the Home Secretary can do anything. I wish to goodness we had any way of finding out who did it—if Mister Desmond didn't?" This was in a whisper.

"He may have shot himself."

"That's the thing! He *may*, and I told this to them. But you see, sir, where is the gun? I ask ye that. Them unlucky men took him up, and nobody can swear to the exact place he was found. I've had the peelers and a dozen men trapesing all over the bog, but not a sign of the gun."

"Somebody must have seen him leave his house with it—his servant; was he examined?"

"Faith, he just was," responded the Coroner, with a melancholy sigh; "and he told us nothing at all. He has been drinking hard ever since, and nothing can get it out of his head but that it was young O'Grady who did it."

"But what about the gun? It hasn't been found, you say—is it in his house? Has that been searched?"

"Every blessed corner of it; and Ryan swore that, to the best of his belief—not that I think much of that same, Mr. Raymond—his master had sent the gun to be mended. He wouldn't or he *couldn't* tell us to whom it was sent; but anyways I wish from my heart we could find it; and another thing, sir—I wish we could find out where Mister Desmond was about that time. Not that I think he had any act or part in it, but just to stop their tongues. That Ryan, when he has the sup taken, stops at nothing, and he has been saying that the verdict is a false one, and that we all know Mister Desmond did it."

Indeed, the voice of the said Ryan was just at that moment being uplifted in very drunken declarations that his master was a *murdered man*. "Killed—don't ye be talkin', boys! It's meself knows who did it. Arrah, don't tell me. Oh, thim O'Grady's are onlucky! Is it a verdict? Who cares for it? I say, an' I'll swear too, that Mister Desmond killed him! Where was the gun? Who else did it? I ax you if it was his own

gun that did it. Shure, it would be found!" and so forth.

"An' there's rayson in that, too," said another; "an' we all know that there was bad blood between them—always fightin', they wor."

But the jurymen stoutly held to their opinion, and maintained that there was really no evidence at all to show how those wounds had been inflicted.

George Raymond went out of the smoky room into the purer air to try and "think out" this problem. So far, Desmond O'Grady was safe enough. It could, at all events, be proved that no living creature had seen him at or near the place where the body had been found, and his gun was at home, though there was no satisfactory evidence to prove when it had been replaced in its accustomed corner. But there still remained the very uncomfortable fact that he had been out with his gun that day, that he had not returned home at night, and that he was still absent. If he were really innocent, why should he so far play the part of a guilty man by flight? and, guilty or not, where was he? In vain George Raymond asked himself that question.

The questions that pressed so heavily on George Raymond's mind were more easily solved by the popular prejudice or feeling. Almost everybody thought that Desmond O'Grady had a hand in the murder. Not that they blamed him greatly. Those whose lives have been spent in Ireland know how high party feeling runs, and how little is thought of human life when disputes arise. The twelve men, let us hope, acted according to their light when they gave that verdict; and to be sure it was perfectly true that there was not a tittle of anything like evidence to show how James Sullivan came by his death; but those twelve men believed that he must have been shot by somebody, or something, and in their hearts thought who was so likely to do it as Desmond O'Grady, whose strange absence from home had of course been commented on. So the matter rested; and far and near went the report, as impalpable as air, and as impossible to catch and imprison, that it was young O'Grady who had killed James Sullivan, and was "hiding in consequence." There was not a bit of use in talking of want of evidence to connect one name with the other. Evidence, indeed! That was by no means necessary. Every man, woman, and child felt that "Mister Desmond" was to be pitied, not blamed. All, except the smaller faction of the Sullivans, who, to be sure, were loud in their denunciations of

## KITTY O'GRADY.

the murderer, and quite ready to hang him without judge or jury.

And it was this news that George Raymond had to bring back, and break (as if any such news can be broken!) to Desmond O'Grady's father and sister. Kitty's eyes, rather than her lips, asked the question that he replied to by saying:

"The verdict is that there is no evidence to show how he came by his death."

Then she said, "They say Desmond did it."

"For Heaven's sake, who told you that?" he asked, with an ignorance of Irish matters which would have made Kitty laugh at another time. Had not Peggy heard it from the donkey-boy, who, in his turn, had heard it from the dairy-woman? Why, the news had spread like wildfire! Was the poor old father still ignorant of the death of James Sullivan and of Desmond's disappearance? George Raymond asked that question.

"He suspects something," said Kitty. "He is so quick; he guesses things. What are we to say to him?"

He could have blessed her for using that little word "we," yet was ready to blame himself for selfishness. "Sooner or later he will know that your brother is not at home," he said—"that's certain. Perhaps he may come back to-day. What folly or weakness was it that took him away just now?"

"You don't believe that he did this thing?" said the girl, flushing an angry red on cheek and temple. "You don't speak," she went on. "I know what that means. Go away, Mr. Raymond—go, sir! If you believe Desmond killed this man, what do you want here? I am his sister, and I know he is innocent; and you dare to tell me you think it possible that he is *not?*"

"It is not much matter what I think," he said calmly. "You know very well I would not harm a hair of his head."

"I know nothing about it," said the girl, wilfully and hotly; then the passion broke, as a wave breaks against a cliff and spends itself, and she began to cry. The world seemed a bitter and a cold place; there was nothing but trouble in it, and Kitty's heart was full to overflowing—too full to allow her to be capable of just reasoning, or even common fairness:

"You are angry with me," said Mr. Raymond; "but if you would consider—I am very anxious to see the best way out of this trouble. Now, I won't discuss the question of your brother's share in the matter; but supposing that he is quite free from it, and of course you know him best, he has acted foolishly in staying away. Those

who dislike him say he has good reason for doing so. There is another thing—if we could trace the missing gun—they say that a gun there must have been."

"But what is the good of that?" asked Kitty.

"Don't you see? If he shot himself the gun must be lying somewhere. They did search, but without finding it. If the gun was found near the spot, no one could possibly think anything but that it was an accident, for he was not a likely person to commit suicide."

"I see; and if it isn't found?"

"Matters remain where they are."

"Listen, Mr. Raymond." She was very pale now, and her hands were quite cold and damp, and her voice had lost its old sweet ring and sounded like that of some old, old woman. "Could they—now, you know—could they do anything to Desmond *now*?—I mean, if they thought there was any reason to think him guilty?"

"If there was any new evidence to connect him with it," said George Raymond. Then he started forward, putting out his hands; he thought she was about to faint. She didn't lose consciousness, but there was a momentary deathly feeling, as if her senses were leaving her. For a moment only it lasted—one brief, blessed moment, during which he supported her on his arm. Then she looked up, with a sort of sobbing sigh.

"I see how it is," she said. "Well, Mr. Raymond, it is good of you to tell me, and you have been very kind. You will forgive me if I've been rude and cross—"

He caught her cold hands in his. "Some time or other," he said, "I may be able to bring you some comfort. Believe me when I say it would cost me little to give you my life. You little know how much it pains me to cause you a moment's sorrow. Now, good-bye—good-bye; let me know the very moment you hear anything of your brother."

"And will you come and tell me if you hear anything more?" she said. She spoke with a direct simplicity that went to his heart; and he promised to come, and then said good-bye again, and went away.

## CHAPTER V.

"WITH SORROW TO THE GRAVE."

KITTY went sorrowfully back to her father's room. The poor old man knew nothing of what had been going on, and his questions pierced poor Kitty's heart. Desmond, where was he? The lad would come to

mischief, said Mr. O'Grady. Was there no news? Why was Kitty so dull and silent? The poor thing kept back her tears, and put on a sort of a smile.

Of course Peggy knew all about it, and had been duly charged to keep perfect silence on the subject until—until when? Well, there is a wonderful vitality in hope, and the poor women could not help hoping that any moment might bring back the wanderer. But the slow day passed by, and the evening shadows began to gather, and still Desmond did not return. There was a faint wind rising, and it swept round the old house, and howled dismally in the tall chimneys; and one would have fancied that there were sad and strange sounds mingling with its gusts.

As the twilight was fast changing into the more sombre hues of night, a visitor walked slowly along the avenue, and after some hesitation, as if not quite sure of a welcome, made his way to the front door. After the good old fashion of the days gone by, when the "open door" and hospitality of the O'Gradys of Ballybroughy were things often spoken of, that door was not locked. The visitor pushed it open with an unsteady hand, and looked into the hall on which the door opened. A lamp was dimly burning within. Then he entered and walked upstairs, holding by the banisters, and stopping once or twice, as if either ill or giddy. He had a heavy, red face, ruddy now from drink, and he was just drunk enough to be very pot-valiant.

Peggy (little thinking that such a visitor would dare to intrude) had gone to the kitchen, and poor K'tty was sitting by her father's chair, a newspaper in her hand, from which she had been reading, though the letters had danced before her hot eyes.

A step outside the door, then the door pushed open. "Who the deuce is that?" cried the old man, with surprise and anger.

Kitty started up. She put out her hands as if to shield her father from some unknown or but faintly contemplated danger. "Who am I, is it?" said a harsh voice, with a sort of defiance in it. "I'll soon tell ye, sir. It's myself that is not a bit ashamed nor afraid nayther of me name nor me nation. I'm Mick Ryan, wan of the Ryans of Drumshane, nayther more nor less; an' it's what I'm come to tell ye all is this—that it was yer fine bould son that shot me master beyant; and for all the coroners and juries in Ireland, I hope to live to see him hanged for it!"

"Stop!" shouted the old man, in a voice at once so strange and terrible that Kitty

shook from terror. "*What's this you're saying?* You lie, and you know it's a lie." "A lie, is it? *Faith, sorr a lie.* Yer fine son, it was he shot me master; an' he's hidin' now. Shot him dead! an' then they get twelve honest men, by the way, to say nobody knew how it kem about. But for all that, maybe Misther Desmond'll find it isn't so aisly to hide; an' maybe it's myself won't be glad to see him hangin'. Why not?"

But these last words fell on unheeding ears. "Is this true, Kitty?" said Mr. O'Grady. A deathly pallor had fallen on his fine face.

"No, no, father!" she said. "It's *not* true—not what this man says. Don't you listen to him—don't believe him."

"That's a good one," said the man, insolently. "Ye may believe it, then. Me master is dead, an' the country knows 'twas yer own son that shot him, though the jury were too soft about it."

Kitty clung to her father, and put her hands to his ears, as if to keep him from hearing those bitter words.

"Leave the room—leave the house!" he said distinctly, but faintly.

"When I plaze, and *as I plaze*," said the man; but the next moment a strong hand was laid on his arm, and before he could recover either his breath or his impudent assurance, he was whirled out of the room.

"He's gone—he's gone, daddy!" said Kitty, kneeling by her father's side.

The old man put out his hand. It rested on the girl's head with a gesture of blessing.

"Speak to me—speak to your own Kitty!" she cried, and she looked into his face and saw—

What?

That awful change that comes but once upon the face of mortals—that strange and solemn stillness and pallor which have no likeness to life. She put her lips close to his ear for some word that might convey a farewell; for though Kitty had never seen a dying person, she knew—she knew! There is something within us that tells us when the end has come.

Listen as she might, it was but a half-sigh and a broken whisper that met her ear; and she fancied—was it a fancy? that the pale lips said her brother's name. Perhaps; she never could be quite sure, for then the head fell gently back on the pillow, the hand dropped from Kitty's clasp, and she knew that she was fatherless. She knelt by his side still, as if movement might bring on the surer knowledge that she yet did not need, for she knew that he was gone from her.

Presently the door opened ; it was Peggy, hastily summoned by George Raymond, who had been the agent by whose action Mr. Mick Ryan had been forcibly expelled. One glance showed the old woman the truth.

"Miss Kitty," she said, "get up, child. The poor master's gone. The heavens be his bed ! Get up, miss ; you can't help him anyways now."

Kitty stood up and looked at the still, white face, and then Peggy's words, so sternly true—for her poor old father was far removed now from her little cares and fondnesses—struck the girl's heart. *That's what we feel most, just at the very first moment when our dead lie before us. They have done with us. We may weep and lament them ; our tears fall unheeded by them, our cries are spent in vain. Afterwards may come hope and comfort, but not at that first moment which breaks the closely tied bonds, and puts an awful gulf between the one who has just gone from us and we who linger here.*

"Cry your fill, alanna," said Peggy, whose own tears were flowing fast ; and it was in Peggy's arms that the poor thing shed the first tears, which seemed to come with actual bodily pain.

George Raymond waited downstairs as patiently as best he might. As for Mr. Mick Ryan, short work had been made of that hero. Mr. Raymond, though not a young man, was strong and active, more than a match, you may be sure, for the feeble, unsteady creature whose daily potations of bad whisky had several times brought him within the grasp of the demon delirium tremens. It was in vain for him to struggle, in vain for him to curse and swear, and equally in vain to try the power of what, in his sober moments, he would have called "a grain of soft sauder." Once out of the room where Mr. Raymond had found him "dressed in a little brief authority," the downward passage of the stairs was an easy matter. Yet the strong man held him gently, and took care not to hurt him, thinking, "Poor wretch ! this is what drink brings a man to ; and, after all, there is love and regret for a dead master and friend at the bottom of all this impudent presumption." Yes, he held him as gently as he could, though those strong arms of his could have made Mick Ryan a helpless cripple for life, and he took him to the hall-door and set him free.

Then he went back to the drawing-room and waited—almost in darkness, save for the small light that the hall lamp threw in at the open door. How very still everything was ! How distinctly one heard the

ticking of the great old clock ! Sometimes the wind shook the window-frame, and once George Raymond almost fancied he heard a step on the gravel without. He went to the window to try and see through the darkness if there was any one lingering about. Not Mick Ryan ; he was on his way to the village, a good deal sobered, and rather afraid that he should get into trouble on account of his proceedings. There was nothing to be seen but the indistinct forms of the great trees waving their gaunt branches to and fro, to and fro.

Then he heard a door somewhere upstairs shut, and then steps. He knew very well that those steps were not those of Kitty ; rather of trembling age, that comes softly, and as if there was nothing worth much haste, as if caution and care burdened the heavy feet and bowed down the weary limbs. Peggy it was—Peggy, with very red eyes and a melancholy-looking candle in her trembling hand.

"Is that you, sir?" she said. "The poor master's gone, sir. It's a sad an' a sorrowful night for us all."

"And your young mistress?"

"I've just come from her, sir. She's half dead with cryin' and mournin', an' I think she's asleep. 'Tis the sore wakin' she'll have."

"Then I cannot see her to-night?"

"No, sir, no. Let her sleep, if she can ; she has the youth in her, an' tis airy to wear them out. The likes of them can't bear much sorrow. If we only knew where Misther Desmond was," said the poor old woman, sadly. "Shure he ought to be here, now that his father is dead, an' his poor sister all alone in the world."

But nobody in or about Ballybroughy knew where Desmond O'Grady was, or why he had disappeared so strangely. Mr. Raymond could give her no comfort on this point.

"I shall come early in the morning," he said. "Tell your young mistress I must see her—I have something to say to her that she will be glad to hear."

All night long in the still chamber where the dead man lay, lights were burning, and watchers sat in patient attendance, after the kindly Irish fashion that has surely something to recommend it. Because he was dead, why should he lie alone and neglected in the house that had once been his ? There was nobody to take the place of head-mourner. Distant relations there were, but none of them lived close at hand.

Madam Bourke had sent a special messenger, who came straight, as the crow flies, over miles of bog and country roads,

with a kindly little note to Kitty, and all sorts of messages, which would be followed by herself as speedily as possible.

"Mr. Raymond wants to see you, Miss Kitty," said Peggy. The long night was over, and the tardy day stole in at the shrouded windows.

"I can't see him," she said.

"But he says he won't keep you a moment," said Peggy. "It's about Master Desmond, I think, miss."

"Desmond!" cried Kitty, starting up; "has he heard from him?"

"No, miss, not that; but he has something to tell you about him. Shure you'd better come and see the gentleman."

Kitty looked down at her dress. Nothing black had she to wear, and though she had chosen the very darkest and plainest dress in her scanty wardrobe, still it wasn't mourning.

"Arrah! don't mind your dress, miss. Shure, he won't know what you have on. Now don't think of them little things; and, indeed, to my mind, miss, when I'm fretting about a body I'd care little if I had all the colours of the rainbow upon me. Just smooth your hair, alanna, an' don't keep him waiting."

George Raymond knew the step very well, you may be sure, though it was very slow, and unlike the rapid, lightsome spring with which Kitty generally descended the stairs. Then the door opened and she came in and shook hands with him; and looking into his face she read two things—one, that he was very sorry for her loss; but the other—could it be possible that he had any good news for her?

"You have something to tell me," she said. "What is it?"

"I have heard nothing about your brother," said he, at once replying to her eager and anxious look. That was one thing about George Raymond—straight to the point he always went.

Her face fell, and she withdrew the hand that she had allowed him to retain for a moment.

"But I have something to tell you that you will like to hear. You know about the accident—how people spoke, and what suspicions attached to your brother? Well, I was determined to try myself, and search for the gun that *must* have been used by the man if he shot himself. Everybody seemed to think that *that* question was set at rest by the assertion made by Ryan as to the man having gone out without his gun; but the gun has been found."

"Where? who found it?"

"Not far from the spot where he fell—perhaps, indeed, on the spot, for the men

who took him home could not clearly fix on the place. One said it was close to the bog; another, that it was *in* the bog; and it is not easy to distinguish one part of it from another," added Mr. Raymond, who remembered that bog and its monotonous tufts of grass and heather, and its unvaried surface of brown turf.

"You found it?" she said.

Then he told her the story of its discovery: how he had determined to make an effort to search the ground more thoroughly, in spite of the wiseheads of the village, who were ready to swear that "all was done that men could do," and, like the hopeless work of the Jacobite cavalier, "all had been done in vain." Why, they said, the man was dead—would soon be buried; the "Crowner" had sat on him; and though they were "certain sure" that Desmond O'Grady had killed him, yet the said Desmond had fled; and, with the easy-going nature of the Irish, they asked what on earth was the good of making more fuss about the matter?

George Raymond listened impatiently to about half these speeches; then he went to the little police-station, and there he got what he wanted—viz., two men who would accompany him on his search: not strictly legal, perhaps, but one must stretch the line sometimes, and head-constable Malligan was a friend of Desmond O'Grady, and quite willing to lend his aid to anything that might help to raise the veil which shrouded both the death of Jemmy Sullivan and the fate of young O'Grady.

Had the men who came across James Sullivan's body been careful to note the exact spot where it lay before they moved it, it would have been easy to make a close search; but in the fright and wonder of the moment one was ready to swear to one place, another equally willing to declare that they had found him in quite another. One thing they had agreed upon, at least without much dissension, and that was that the body had been found some yards from a little stream or ditch where the black bog water slowly crept along; and all along the bank they had scouted for the possible gun that might be lying there, but nothing was to be found save the brown turf and dry heather. George Raymond, who had a share of northern perseverance, was not to be foiled by disappointment. Steadily refusing to think of its being a case of murder, there remained but one possibility—he must have shot *himself*. To be sure, there were some odd-looking bruises on the poor dead body, in addition to that more deadly wound from which—as the doctors swore—he must have bled to death.

within a very short period after the gun had been fired ; and though a man might, in a fit of madness, shoot himself, he would hardly bruise himself also.

But puzzling as the affair was, Mr. Raymond set himself to the task, while the two policemen acted as his aides-de-camp, and poked, and prodded, and ranged over the bog like pointers in a stubble-field. It was George Raymond who was to find the missing gun. He found it, half buried in a great tuft of heather and moss cotton, just where the palsied hand of the wounded man must have let it fall. The first impulse was to stoop and pick it up, the second was of a more calculating and prudent nature. He stood still and called the others.

"Bedad, he's got something," said one of them, and they ran to the spot. It was plain enough then how the accident had happened ; for the old, much-worn, and often-mended gun had at last finished its career—it had burst, the contents going through its owner's body, and part of the stock hitting him severely.

"Oh, holy Biddy !" said one of the men, piously. "It's the world's wonder of a gun now, so it is." Neither gunsmith nor any other smith could make it a gun again.

"I always told him he'd get his death by the same gun," said the other official.

They took it up carefully, and then they saw a brace of dead snipe close by, marked with blood not their own. It was plain enough now. James Sullivan had died from the bursting of his own gun. The dead birds must have fallen with the gun, at the same moment, from his agonised hand ; and then he must have exerted his last energy in crossing the little stream, for there were the marks of a man's feet in the thick black mould. This was certain, for it was at the other side of the stream that the body had been found, and nobody had ever thought of what was the truth—that the injured man had desperately sought the nearest way home, and had sunk exhausted from loss of blood, after staggering some yards. There could be no reasonable doubt now about the affair. The wounds were precisely those that would be caused by such an accident ; and Desmond O'Grady was quite cleared from all suspicion.

Kitty heard what George Raymond had to tell her. "Oh, you good, kind man !" she said, and the light came to her eyes and the colour to her cheek—only for a moment. Then the sadness of the present came back to her, and clouded her face. Her father lay dead upstairs, and Desmond

—where was he ? They might ask that question, but no answer came to it. He was gone—never again to come back to the old house where he had spent his careless, thoughtless life ; never again to hear the voice of the old man who had gone away from them all to the far-off land of shadows.

George Raymond had something else to say to Kitty, but not then—not when the first sharpness of sorrow made her sacred in his eyes. Afterwards, perhaps, when a little time had passed, and her sorrow should be softer, and this mystery about Desmond should be cleared up, then, perhaps, she might know that he cared for her, and she might be willing to come to him and be his love—his wife—the only woman in the world for him.

Poor man ! one can't help pitying him, for his youth was past, and yet here he was as love-sick as any school-boy, ready to lay himself, his money, and his goods at the feet of a simple girl who wore shabby dresses and untidy hair, and who hadn't the accomplishments that once upon a time he thought every woman ought to have.

So, with a new-born hope in his heart, he left her.

## CHAPTER VI.

### NEWS OF DESMOND.

**W**INTER and spring were things of the past ; here was lusty summer, like a god, crowned with blood-red roses, making the earth beautiful with leaves and blossoms, filling the air with sweet essences, and painting the skies all of a sapphire blue. Summer—not less beautiful in the quiet Irish home where Kitty had found a comfortable, if not a happy, refuge, than in dear old Ballybroughy.

The latter place was empty now, and bare, save for a caretaker who had been installed by Mr. Raymond. Everybody—that means all the little world around him—wondered at his lethargy in not at once altering, pulling down, building up, making a grand new lamp, in short, out of the old dim one. He did nothing of the kind. He seemed to be quite taken up with his work upon the other property that he had bought, where, indeed, he was making improvements that opened the eyes of the country-folk.

"Dig wid a four-pronged fork, is it ?" one Paddy says, with horror. "Shure, such a thing was never seen ; any one can dig wid a spade." But Mr. Raymond and his

Scotch overseer meant those new steel forks for use, not for ornament, and it soon became known that those who took Mr. Raymond's money did as he, Mr. Raymond, pleased, and *exactly* as he pleased.

Then he planted judiciously, and then were carefully fenced, little groups of young larch and fir, placed just where they would be most effective, and where no other sort of vegetable life would do much good. Not that he neglected Ballybroughy. The gardens were set to-rights and carefully tended, and sundry very necessary repairs were made. Leaks were stopped, broken walls repaired, and the house put in fair order; but beyond that Mr. Raymond did not go: no, though Lord Enniskean pointed out to him how it would "pay" to have a conservatory thrown out here, and new offices there, and, in fact, how a "few thousands" would make the old home of the O'Grady's a place worth inhabiting by such a man as Mr. Raymond.

Even Madam Bourke, under whose ample wing the orphaned girl found shelter, wondered at his abstinence. "For," said she, "when those new men come to an old place they like to play pitch and toss with it. New fashions everywhere. I declare, now, Mr. Raymond is a nice man, that he is, Kitty." And she wondered why the girl should blush so deeply.

Madam was quick-witted, she could "put two and two together;" she remembered that Mr. Raymond had almost given up calling at Castle Bourke ever since one fine day when he and Kitty had taken a walk together, and when Kitty had complained of headache in the evening. "Kitty," said Madam, solemnly, "you never told me that Mr. Raymond asked you to marry him."

Kitty grew redder and tossed her little head defiantly: the girl's spirits were coming back to her with the blessed elasticity of youth. Not that she forgot "daddy"—don't think it! nor Desmond either—poor lost Desmond, of whose fate nothing was known. Guesses, indeed, had been made as to his having come to his end by some mischance. Rash and headstrong, there were rivers to drown him, bog-holes to smother him. He was gone, his place knew him no more. But time softens, though it may not remove, grief; so Kitty had regained something of her old pretty ways, and would even mimic kind, managing little "Madam," and laugh at and with her too.

But Madam had been too sharp for Miss Kitty this time. "How did you find it out?" asked the latter, looking very guilty indeed.

"Oh, I'm no fool," said Madam. "I see it all now—that *you* are the fool, child. What could you make such a mistake for? To refuse the man who could have given you a home of your own! Oh, Kitty! Kitty!"

"And that's the very reason," said the girl. "Because everybody would just say I wanted a home, not the man, there! and because he'd think so. Now, when I do marry I'll do it because I love the man, not for the sake of his house."

"Well, well, 'tis hard to please you. He's as good as gold, and a gentleman; and though he hasn't ancestors—why, he has wit, and sense, and a noble heart. But there is no use in crying over spilt milk; and spilt it is. I hear he's going to be married."

If Kitty was red before, she was white now. Her eyes fell before Madam's keen look. "Is he? good luck to him!" she said in a very gay tone, which did not deceive Madam.

"So they say. Oh, Lord Enniskean is a clever man! He knew what he was about when he asked Mr. Raymond to the Castle, and used to send him out riding with one of those red-haired clumsy girls; and they say he's taking the eldest. She hasn't a penny, and she's thirty-five, if she's a day!"

It was a fine day, and the sun came strongly in—perhaps that was the reason why Kitty turned away from the window; perhaps it was because at that very moment Mr. Raymond was seen riding up to the door.

"Come for our congratulations," thought Kitty. It was strange how cold her heart felt; but she put on a woman's armour, and had a smile all cut and dried. Why not? Need she lose him as a friend because he was going to be married—because another had elected to take the place she had refused? But here common-sense came in with her cold warning, "Nonsense! when he's married adieu to his kindly offices; you have cast away a good chance for happiness."

He came in, shook hands with the elder lady, then with Kitty. Madam always had a smile and warm welcome for him. "You have been out riding?" she said.

"Yes; I met Lord Enniskean and his daughter." Kitty got furiously red, and hated herself for it. Madam looked sharply at her.

"And I called at the post-office for my own letters, and brought some on for you, as you don't get afternoon post here."

"Thank you, thank you," said Madam; but Kitty was silent, she expected no letters,

yet there was one for her—one that George Raymond handed her.

With a little cry she opened the envelope. "Desmond!" she said. "He's alive and well—alive and well!"

The letter was from America; and it was the key to the mystery of Desmond's disappearance. It told how he had come upon the dead body of Jemmy Sullivan when returning from shooting. He had seen or guessed that a gun-shot wound had caused his death; and as the weapon was not to be seen, he at once feared that others might think him guilty of the man's death. Hastening home unseen, he had, in an agony of terror, replaced his own gun in its usual corner, and taking the scanty store of money in his possession, had left his home. He had managed to escape any special notice, and reached Liverpool; there he heard that suspicion had attached to him, and that the Coroner's verdict—an open one—would not render him safe. He took a berth in an ocean-bound steamer, and had had a good passage to New York. While there he had read in an Irish paper the circumstance of the finding of the gun, and of course he saw that James Sullivan's death was thus accounted for. He was going "up country," and gave only a sketchy plan of his possible future.

"Tell my father," he wrote—he did not know that the summer leaves were waving over the old man's grave in the churchyard.

Kitty stole out of the room to re-read her letter—to cry over it too. Desmond was alive, to be sure, but was lost to her. America seemed almost another world. She wandered down the garden-paths sadly enough. Relief and pain mingled in her heart.

"I am a fool to cry when I know Desmond is alive," she said to herself; but still her tears fel' heavily. The picture seemed very gloomy. To be sure, she had a home, and Madam was very good and kind, but the dear old home and the careless, happy days of the past came back to her painfully.

A step on the gravel. She dried her eyes and turned round, with a smile on her lips that was rather uncertain and tremulous. "Did not I bring you good news?" It was Mr. Raymond; his face was lit up with a pleasant smile.

"Very good; I am very happy." He looked down at her face, perhaps thinking that she did not speak the truth.

"I am happy too," he said, "and very

glad that I should have been the one to bring it to you."

She was silent, and he said, "I came about something else."

"Now is the time to congratulate him," she thought, and with a desperate effort she said, "To tell us some news, I suppose?"

"Well, perhaps. Can you guess it?"

"I think I can—that you are going to be married;" "and to an ugly old painted creature too," she thought, but she wisely did not say it.

"Well, yes—I hope so—

"I hope you will be happy, very happy." She managed to look bravely up, and there were no tears in her bright eyes. This time she was speaking the truth.

"If I marry I shall be," he said.

"And when is it to be?" What could he mean by that "if"?

"You can answer that question. Come, Kitty, best and sweetest Kitty, you know you're the only creature in the world I ever loved, the only one I'd marry. Don't send me away *this* time."

Madam waited awhile that summer's day all alone. "If he asks her now, will she refuse him again? I think not. The little goose likes him better than she thinks."

When Kitty came in, Madam's doubts and fears were set at rest. "He has gone," said the girl, "but he's to come here tomorrow, and—"

"You needn't tell me another word," said Madam. "Bless you, child, any one with half an eye could see what he had come for."

So you see, after all, that Kitty was to come back to Ballybroughy, and to reign there as mistress.

The story of Desmond O'Grady gradually became known. Not that the reason for his flight was told. Like other mysteries, that, after all, were no mystery at all, the clue to it had been plain enough. But you will find some still who stoutly maintain that Desmond O'Grady never wrote from America at all—never left sign or token of his existence. These people delight in talking of his disappearance as a thing that has never been accounted for. And if you were to meet with them at some wake or wedding, and chat to them over a glass of whisky, it is possible they would give you an enlarged and embellished edition of the death of Jemmy Sullivan, and of the "spiriting away" of Desmond O'Grady, to them the latter event being still "the mystery of Ballybroughy."

ELIZABETH J. LYSAGHT.

# TEA-TABLE TALK.—BY AMY KEN.

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 ONTRARY to usual custom, when the little party assembled round Miss Ken's table, a melancholy spirit seemed to have fallen upon all. Helena was there, dressed in deep mourning; and indeed the other girls, one and all, had sombre clothing, though not so gloomy as that worn by Mrs. Claire. As to Miss Ken herself, as she never dressed in coloured garments, there was no change in her ordinary appearance. Before the young people had time to settle down to what that lady called rational conversation, Mrs. Marston made her appearance, and addressing Helena, said—

"I am very anxious to know how Mrs. Cunliffe supported herself under the sad trial she had to pass through. What a terrible thing to be left a widow so early an age! How did it all happen?"

"You know," replied Helena, "Mrs. Cunliffe is my husband's sister; and she married a gentleman who was well provided for by his parents—having an income of £800 a-year, independent of his profession. He was a prudent man, and always lived within his income, fond of outdoor recreation, but never indulging to excess in anything. He could afford one hunter, and he kept it well, quite satisfied in following the hounds once or twice a week, and turning to business on other days. Though a lawyer, he did not believe in over-work, and considered that the fagged mind never accomplished any good thing as a certainty. He went to Scotland with a friend on a fishing excursion up the Tay, telling his wife that after he tired of rod and line he would take apartments for herself and the little boy at Broughty Ferry, where they would spend some pleasant days, and she should return to London with Scotch roses, not Scotch thistles. How poor Adelaide read and re-read the letter which fixed a date for her departure from London, I can scarcely tell you. Was there a presentiment in her mind that such happiness was not in store for her? I often wondered; but tears would bedew her eyes whenever she unfolded it. She had even packed her portmanteaus and made preparations complete for the journey. They were to start on Monday. I called on Friday to say good-bye, and scarcely had I taken a seat in the cosy morning-room, when a telegram arrived which Mrs. Cunliffe opened with trembling fingers. It contained only four words—

*'Your husband is ill.'* The paper dropped from her hands, and she turned deadly pale. 'I must go at once,' she cried. 'Helena, take charge of my boy. Nobody can nurse him like you.' She sent for 'Bradshaw,' and found no through train left till 3 o'clock. It was then 11 a.m. I assisted in my sister-in-law's arrangements; but ere an hour had passed, another telegram arrived. *'Your husband is in a dangerous state. We are doing the best we can for him, but fear the worst.'* One terrible scream escaped from her pallid lips, and then she fell prostrate on the hearth. I sent for the family doctor, I sent for a neighbouring clergyman, and they came instantly. Under the care of the medical man she partially recovered, but in delirious accents cried, 'Let me go, let me go to my husband.' The clergyman took the precaution to telegraph for an answer, addressed to him. It came. *'Mr. Cunliffe is dead.'* Never shall I forget the fatherly kindness of that good man. 'In the midst of life we are in death!' he ejaculated, as if the thought came by sudden inspiration. 'What did you say about *death?*' hurriedly and huskily screamed my poor sister-in-law. 'Your husband,' said the reverend gentleman, solemnly, 'has gone to a better world, and hopes to meet you there when this short life is over, never more to part. You must be resigned to God's will; He knows what is best for us.' One hard look of despair, as she heard the servants sobbing in the passage, as she saw me convulsed with sorrow, and the blood seemed to leave her cheeks, every nerve in her body twitched. The affliction was too great for her tears; from the hands of the doctor she took some restoratives, and then, as if rousing herself for the greatest effort, said, 'I did not close his eyes, but I will follow him to the grave!'

"Stop, Helena, my dear! do stop!" said Mrs. Marston, "you are choking us!" and indeed the recitation had caused the whole party to weep, even including Miss Ken.

"Well," replied Helena, "I am now coming to practical matters; and for the information of others I want to show how much trouble those in grief may escape by a knowledge of circumstances. It was necessary for Mrs. Cunliffe to have widow's weeds prepared as quickly as possible; and in our need and necessity we came to

Miss Ken for advice. She at once said, 'Don't fill the house with milliners, and bother the poor young widow with continual measurings, fittings-on, and other arrangements. Take the dress that fits her best, and go to Jay's in Regent Street. With that only as their guide, they will supply you with everything needful for a widow to wear, from the crown of the head to the sole of the feet.' My sister-in-law left it all to us. In the afternoon of Saturday we gave the order fully; and as the funeral was fixed for Wednesday, Mrs. Cunliffe determined to start on Tuesday morning; and when Monday night came every possible article needed was forwarded to the widow; and if anything could serve to gratify her under the circumstances it was the admirable wardrobe thus obtained. The dresses fitted her to perfection, as well as if they had been 'tried on' two or three times."

"What a comfort for her to have all these details arranged without any trouble! There is nothing more distressing when one is suddenly bereaved, than to have the mind distracted with all the petty arrangements of dressmakers!" said Mrs. Marston. "Judith, you will come with me this afternoon. Your aunt will kindly excuse you, as we must go into complimentary mourning, and cannot do better than pay a visit to Jay's, it appears."

"I saw one little feature that pleased me much while I was there," said Helena, "and that was gloves with a pocket in the left hand. I purchased a pair, which you may see. The little pocket outside the glove in the palm of the hand will hold a florin and small silver, or about three sovereigns in gold. They are not by any means expensive, and will, I think, be valuable to ladies travelling about London; as instead of carrying a purse they can put fourpenny-pieces and sixpences here to pay omnibuses and railway fare; therefore in more than one sense these gloves are handy."

"How very nice!" said Judith. "I am frequently bothered while out-o'-doors with fumbling after my purse. Mamma, you will buy me a pair of these gloves, will you not?"

"Well, perhaps," said Mrs. Marston, smiling. "But come, we must take our departure, or Aunt Ken will be hindered by us all the afternoon. Helena, I suppose you are coming too."

Helena having signified her intention of going, the three left the room, and Miss Ken and her remaining nieces were alone.

"We were asked the other day," said Annie, "whether this was not the most

romantic age that ever existed; and we determined to inquire from yon."

"It is an extraordinary age for every thing," replied Miss Ken. "We are living in the midst of men who have bewildered the world by their science, and amongst these are the merchant princes of the world who have carried commercial enterprise to the highest pitch of perfection. We live amongst those who are so devoted to religion that they cast aside every benefit earth can afford to carry out, to the extreme, the worship of the Great Creator, and who are ready to sacrifice their lives in the cause of what they consider the Gospel mandates. Take a contrast: we live in the midst of the most determined gamblers the world ever knew, the most determined reprobates, and the most determined mockers and scoffers at religion, the greatest blasphemers and the vilest of mankind. In the midst of all this pure love holds sway as it did from the earliest days of creation. You perhaps call this *romance*, but not in the accepted sense of the poet:—

'Love, that's the world's preservative  
That keeps the soul of things alive,  
Preserves the mighty power of fate,  
And gives mankind a longer date,  
The life of nature—that restores  
As fast as time and death devours,  
And to it the world doth owe  
Not only earth but heaven too.  
For love's the only trade that's driven  
An interest of state in heaven.'

There is the love of the pure, of the holy, of the great, and of the good, that does not come under the category of romance in your sense; but the affection which springs up between young people should be pure, and according to ordinary rules it will cement happiness for life. If, however, you imply that people are more susceptible of attachment now than in past ages, I am quite of a contrary opinion; for my conviction is that love and marriage in the present day are too confined to mercenary views to be measured with ancient records. Mr. Isaac Disraeli, in his 'Curiosities of Literature,' says, '*Romance* has been elegantly defined as the offspring of fiction and love.' Now, according to my old notions there should be no fiction in love. However, Carlyle gives you his opinion in his own rough way: 'The age of *romance* has not ceased; it never ceases; it does not if we think of it very sensibly decline. *Great passions no longer show themselves*. Why, there are passions still great enough to replenish Bedlam; a passion that explosively shivers asunder the life it took rise in, ought to be regarded as considerable. More no passion, in the highest day of romance, ever did.'

## FAMOUS MEN AND WOMEN.

### THE BISHOP OF MANCHESTER.

**W**HEN year by year the May Meetings come round, the veteran Earl of Shaftesbury is always to the fore, and, as the president of not a few Church institutions, looks around him for the most efficient platform speakers; and of late years the Bishop of Manchester has been the one most regarded. The practical work he accomplished in the cause of extended education, and in the employment of women and children, &c., prior to his accepting the mitre, has given him such an extensive knowledge of the real wants of the people that his remarks often form new features in the present mode of advancement. From boyhood his depth of thought and his inquiring mind have ever been notable characteristics to ordinary observers. He is the son of James Fraser, Esq., late of Heavitree, Exeter, and was born at Prestbury, near Cheltenham, in 1818. The writer of this biography remembers well young Fraser being in the head class of Bridgnorth Foundation School in 1834, whilst he, much the bishop's junior, was in a lower form. The roll-call still tingles in the writer's ears, "Coley, Bolton, Osborne, Lingen, Fraser," down to the lowest on a list of upwards of ninety. This school was then in a most flourishing condition, many clever boys had obtained honours at the Universities, including "Osborne Gordon," who gained the Hebrew Professorship, and in compliment to whom the boys had a whole holiday.

The head-master, Mr. (afterwards Dr.) Rowley, was heard to say at this time: "But I have two boys in my school who will both make greater men than Gordon. I allude to Lingen and Fraser." In physique they were as different as two boys could be. Lingen was spare and delicately-formed, and looked much younger than his years; Fraser had a fresh countenance, with flaxen hair, a well-developed form, and was the very impersonation of health; but they were close friends, and their weekly themes were treasured by the headmaster as prodigies.

In 1837 Fraser matriculated at Oriel College, Oxford, and soon obtained a Fellowship, gained the Ireland Scholarship in 1839, graduated first-class in classics, and was ordained deacon in 1846, and priest in 1847, having adopted the Church as his profession. In the latter year he was presented to the rectory of Choldepton, Wilts, which living he held until 1860, when he accepted the better rectory of Ufton Nervet, Berks. A year later he was elected Prebendary of Salisbury Cathedral, and shortly afterwards was appointed

chaplain to the Bishop of Salisbury. But during a lengthened period he took an active part in connection with education under the Duke of Newcastle's Commission, to which he presented a Report on Elementary Education in England, and also a Report on Education in the United States and Canada, and a Report on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture. For these services he was appointed Assistant Commissioner on Popular Education, and in 1855 was on the Commission for School Inquiry, and in 1867-68 on the Commission to Inquire into the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture; and to him was accorded immense praise for the voluminous statistics he gathered.

In 1870 he was consecrated second Bishop of Manchester, the diocese of which consists of parts of Lancashire, with an annual stipend of £4,200, together with £400 a year for residence. Here he is very popular with his clergy as a rule; but the High Church party sometimes declaim against his power.

It may be well, perhaps, to show what were the Bishop of Manchester's early views concerning national education. He first takes up the idea of many, that children can be instructed in all necessary acquirements without religion being introduced, whilst another class were asking if the whole system of education was not overdone, and that we were educating children above their rank, and that the end of all these books, maps, certificates, and training would be to turn out labourers too independent to be employed, servants too conceited to be useful—in a word, men and women unfitted for, and knowing nothing of, the humbler duties of their allotted stations. Now, in answer to these suggestions, the Rev. James Fraser, M.A., when Rector of Choldepton, in 1853, said, in a sermon preached, and afterwards printed: "Before we enter into these arguments we must establish a very important distinction, viz., between mere Instruction and Education in the highest sense of the word. If you take the etymology of the two terms you will at once see the wide difference in their significance. The former means 'putting something *into*,' the latter 'drawing something *out of*' a rational and intelligent being. Instruction is merely putting a child in possession of a certain amount of information—it may be geography, or history, or writing, or arithmetic—with no regard to any moral or religious consequences, without attempting at the same time to develop character, or train dispositions, or correct moral faults—

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### THE BISHOP OF MANCHESTER.

with no regard, in fact, to anything but the intellect, or, as it is sometimes called, the *expacity* of the pupil. Indeed, there are some people—the advocates of a merely secular education, several of whom make speeches to this effect in their place in Parliament—who consider this to be all that is needed, who seem to think that if we make children good geographers, or clever draughtsmen, or ready reckoners, we shall have done all that can be done under our circumstances towards making them good Christians and good subjects. I will merely say that this system has been tried not only in the old heathen schools of Greece and Rome, but to a considerable extent in modern France, and with such unsatisfactory results even to the people themselves that I see by the newspapers there is a strong and growing anxiety to place their schools once more under the influence of the Church, and thus get rid of their so-called *Communal Institutions*. The educationist, in the higher use of the term, aims at a noble end. His object is to employ instruction not as an *end*, but as a means of forming and disciplining character. He looks at a child not simply as a being endowed with such and such a capacity for receiving communicated knowledge, but as a moral and spiritual creature, with instincts and inclinations which have to be weaned from what is bad and fixed into what is good ; with duties to discharge and responsibilities to answer for ; with an immortal soul, whose destiny is made to depend upon his conduct ; who may be a curse or a blessing to society, a ‘companion of devils’ or an inheritor of the kingdom of the saints in light.” Thus, from his own point of view, Bishop Fraser argues in favour of *some* religion.

In his lordship’s Primary Charge in the Cathedral, after taking a glance at general matters, he remarks : “ Gladly as one would avoid on an occasion like the present the temper and the retorts of controversy, it seems hardly possible to do so in Manchester, the scene of the famous Nonconformist Conference of January, 1872: Here it was, after the disastrous defeat in the House of Commons of May, 1871, that the forces arrayed against us—they are hurt if we call them enemies—rallied, and reorganised themselves, and devised the plan of a new campaign. Beaten by a majority of more than four to one—the exact numbers were 374 to 89 on Mr. Miall’s motion, ‘That it is expedient at the earliest practical period to apply the policy initiated by the disestablishment of the Irish Church by the Act of 1869 to the other Churches established by the law in the United Kingdom’—they yet addressed themselves with undaunted

spirit to the undertaking proposed to them by the Prime Minister, that if they hoped to convince the House of Commons they must accomplish the preliminary work of converting to their opinions the majority of the people of England. To this work they have girded themselves with no common vigour in the months that have intervened. The newspapers have teemed with reports of conferences, lectures, addresses, challenges, and statistical returns ; and yet as the sounds of strife reach my ear the war cry seems rather loud than full. Exclusive of a *free lance* here and there who joins the fray on his own account, the army drawn up in line against us is recruited mainly from two—I admit great—denominations, which have been known throughout their history for special hostility to the order and discipline of the Church of England, but which cannot claim to themselves the title of ‘representatives’ of Nonconformity. They are fighting for principles which they themselves have not always consistently held, and which many Nonconformist bodies do not hold now. The great Wesleyan community has not shown any disposition to join in the attack on that Church in the faith and discipline of which their founder meant to die, and from which they have not yet proclaimed themselves dissenters.”

Indeed, the great aim ever since Dr. Fraser has worn the mitre has been to conciliate Wesleyans, and accept them into the Church—that is to say, if they will only come. These views are apparent when a little further on he says, in the same charge : “ What would it be but as ‘life from the dead’ if this important Christian body, identical with the Church in faith, superior to her in the effectiveness of discipline, could once more be incorporated with her ? I know the difficulty of the question of orders ; but surely upon Wesley’s principles and in the interests of Christian unity, upon which so much that is precious hangs, this is a difficulty not impossible to overcome.”

After living many years a bachelor, Bishop Fraser was married in 1880 to Agnes Ellen Frances, daughter of the late John Shute Duncan, Esq., of Weston, Bath. The marriage was a very quiet one, away from his own diocese, and the Bishop desired that there should be no demonstrations ; but on their return from the honeymoon congratulations from all quarters were both numerous and sincere, for it was known to all his friends that for over twenty years his heart had been engaged to his present wife, but filial duty prevented the lady leaving her aged father until death released her of the obligation.

# "OH, WAYWARD LOVE!"

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE MYSTERY OF BRYNGWYLLT," "THE MISTAKE OF MY LIFE," ETC.

## CHAPTER I.



AM going away tomorrow, Lieutenant Redgrave," and I glance at him mischievously to see the doleful effects my words will certainly produce.

Sure enough, his bright, good-tempered face flushes and grows visibly longer, as he ruefully exclaims, "Going away, Miss Dugald? Where, may I ask?"

"To my sister's, Mrs. Burt. Andria will go as well, so we shall probably make a long visit."

A smothered groan is my only answer.

I burst out laughing. "Oh, goodness! Well, you know Elsie better than to need a formal invitation to visitus there; and Greedon is only half an hour by rail. We are expecting a jolly time, for she intends entering upon a round of gaieties, so you will not be dull if you care to come over."

"If I care to come over! I should rather suppose I do."

"I do wish you wouldn't reiterate my words; it is such a silly habit; and you make a point of doing it," I declare pettishly, for the eager concern in his voice is so manifest that the others are laughing.

It is no secret that Percy Redgrave is hopelessly in love with me; and instead of attempting to conceal the fact, the foolish fellow is so proud of it that to my intense annoyance, we have become the subject of a standing joke among our most intimate friends; and, indeed, it is not difficult for outsiders to catch an idea pretty quickly of how the wind blows.

We form a merry group sitting out on the smoothly cut lawn before my home. Dugaldston is a lovely, quaint old manor-house, all ivy and gable-ends; and my father, Squire Dugald, lives there with his niece, Andria Veerholme, and myself. There is a strong affection existing between Andria and me; we are both motherless, and she has lost her father too. After the last sad event, which happened five years ago, my cousin left her desolate home and came to live with us.

Elsie, my married and only sister, is apt to break into vast lamentations on the folly of "two young girls being allowed to run wild, without the proper superintendence of some elderly lady in the house;" but I am a spoilt child, and the idea of a disagreeable old woman prying into our concerns, and putting a check upon all the fun our unbroken spirits lead us into, is exceedingly irksome to me. So when papa tells me of serious conversations with Elsie about it, I coax him into believing that we do not need a

chaperon, except when we go into Society ; and as Elsie is always willing enough to perform that office when we do, I get my way, and the objectionable subject is not again mooted.

Besides we three on the lawn, there are two fellow-officers of Percy's and his sister Pearl. The Lieutenant continues to air his grievance without noticing my last complaint.

“I shall be there—not much doubt about that ; but, you see, my leave expires next week, and we are daily awaiting orders to start for Gibraltar. It's a horrid dull look-out, anyhow.”

“Don't you care to go abroad, then, Lieutenant Redgrave ?” inquires Andria, in her sweet voice, looking so innocently surprised that her companions avert their heads and softly titter. “I should rather like such a nice change myself ; one sees so much abroad.”

Nothing abashed, Percy removes his eyes from my flaming face, and answers, “I like the idea so little, Miss Veerholme, that were I not such an unlucky fellow as to be so unfortunately short of this world's goods, I would sell out to-morrow rather than leave England.”

A merry laugh greets his declaration. “What, and disappoint your expectant friends ?”

“If they *are* expectant I would even do that, Miss Dugald.”

“Well, a pretty soldier you will make if your desire for fame and glory is not more ardent than it appears to be at present,” I aver scornfully.

Percy takes up the gauntlet, and a running fire of badinage ensues, till the seven o'clock gong sounds, and we all troop in to dinner.

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Two evenings later Andria and I are dressing for dinner at Boscombe Lodge, the residence of my sister, Mrs. Burt. We share the same room, for the house is full of visitors, and the accommodation scarce. This arrangement suits us admirably, it affords us such opportunities for the confidential chats and lively banter that are so dear to my fun-loving heart.

I am lying full-length on a couch, clad in a white cashmere dressing-gown, while I slowly fan myself with one of my small nephew's copy-books. Andria stands before the looking-glass plaiting her long silky hair ; for we Dugaldston girls are independent of the assistance of maids ; and this is nearly as sore a subject with Elsie as the want of a proper person to keep us in order.

“I say, Dree, don't you wonder what this paragon is like? Elsie raves about him ; she is so ‘absolutely confident that one of us will fall in love with him.’ I have no doubt she would like us to be married offhand — the same day, if possible—anything to secure the prize ; it would be such a delightful thing, you know.”

“Oh, what a mimic you are !” laughs Dree.

“I wonder if you will be the one to be smitten.”

My cousin smiles quietly. “You see, although we may attain to that (supposedly) desirable state of feeling, the probability is that *he* will not fall in love with either of us, May.”

“Oh, he is sure to admire you—all the men do; you have the *crème de la crème* of every party at your feet ; while poor I,” with an expressive shrug, “have nothing left but the skim-milk.”

“My dear child, you are heartily welcome to win this marvellous hero if you wish to, future title and extensive rent-roll included.”

“Now, that is downright mean to insinuate that I thought of stepping into ‘dead men's shoes.’ His father, Sir Tristling, isn't dead yet, though, nor is he likely to ‘shuffle off this mortal coil’ at present, as far as I can see.”

“You are wrong there ; Elsie says his heart is affected, and any moment may see his death.”

“Poor old gentleman ! I am sorry. Well, my dear, I don't want Mr. Hugh nor any one else. I shall hate him. I invariably detest ‘perfect’ people, especially when I am advised to like them.”

Andria laughs softly as she twists the massive plaits into a low knot on her neck. “It is just likely that you will be very much charmed, May, as you seem to have set yourself so determinedly against him. Things often happen so.”

“They won't now,” I murmur, with half-closed eyes.

“You certainly will have no opportunity of either hating or liking, for to-night, at least, May, unless you stir yourself ; it is time we were dressed already.”

At this juncture there is an approaching sound of *frou-frou* along the corridor ; the door is flung wide open, and my sister, resplendent in maize satin and black lace, enters the room. Seeing our half-dressed condition, she comes to a full stop, and raises her faultlessly gloved hands in horror.

“Why, May ! Andria ! This is really too bad ! Are you aware of the time ? I must

go downstairs immediately, there are many guests coming besides those staying in the house." Her tirade causes me to spring up from my undignified position, making a mischievous grimace over Dree's shoulder in the glass, as I laughingly hurry over my neglected toilet.

"It does not matter much how we look to-night, Elsie, it's only a dry dinner-party; so you need not give us such a scolding," I protest wickedly.

"Indeed, I beg you will take the utmost care as to your appearance. Do not vex me any more, May; and remember that Mr. Dhering is the finest match in the county. A most charming man he is, too; those Seaton girls and Pearl Redgrave are literally mad to catch him."

My upper lip curls scornfully at these exceedingly open hints. "The Seaton girls and Pearl are quite welcome to him," I affirm warmly.

Elsie does not choose to answer me. "I am not afraid for you, Andria; you always behave properly. It is May—she is so wild and childish, and I am naturally more anxious for her to make a good impression than—" she coughs and gets slightly confused as she perceives the blunder she has nearly made.

"Which means that May is the one intended to carry off the prize," affably finishes Andria. "Have no fear, Elsie, I shall not try to prevent her."

Long afterwards I remember her words with bleeding heart and bitterness of spirit.

"Pooh!" I sneer, "don't get that idea into your match-making head, Elsie, for it will never be verified. Go in and conquer, my dear, and I'll give you my blessing," with a melodramatic wave of my now soapy hand towards Andria that disperses the soap bubbles *ad libitum* over my sister's elaborate costume, and sends her flying out of the room, uttering mild expletives regarding "the absurd way that papa allows May to run wild—spoilt, incorrigible child that she is."

Of course we are the last to enter the drawing-room, and several minutes elapse before my portly brother-in-law can safely pilot us through the crush of guests to Elsie, who, calm and important, is waiting to introduce us to all the "best" strangers present. Elsie is a paragon chaperon; no anxious mother with a bevy of fair marriageable daughters on her hands could guard them more carefully from contact with ineligibles than she does us.

There is a slight shade of anxiety perceptible in my sister's eye, for it is the exact dinner-time and her hero has not yet

arrived. She is reluctantly beginning to prepare to move, when a hurried murmur and a slight stir near the door cause all eyes to turn expectantly in that direction, as the butler pompously announces "Mr. Dhering."

"The lion of the evening," "the match of the county"—in such terms is Hugh, only son and heir of Sir Tristing Dhering, of Dhering Chase, spoken of in our part of Blankshire. Mr. Dhering is a stranger to most of us, having gone abroad straight from Oxford. Since then, with the exception of a few flying visits, he has continued his travels, until now, at the special request of his father, he intends at length to settle down amongst his future tenants. It has been a sorely contested point amongst our married ladies who should be the favoured one to introduce the illustrious stranger to Blankshire society; and, by dint of unwearying manoeuvring, to my sister is this enviable distinction accorded.

Mr. Dhering is a tall, powerfully built man of about thirty-five years. His hair, which he wears closely cropped, is dark brown; his beard and whiskers are the same; but his drooping moustache is lightened up by a tinge of tawny gold that is very pretty to see. It is by no means a handsome face, though to my mind there is a certain rugged beauty in the broad, open brow, tanned from exposure to sun and sea, and the clear, searching grey eyes, that is far preferable to the insipid, bland beauty of Apollo-like men, or the orthodox hero with "raven hair and eagle e'en"; but, then, they always call my taste decidedly peculiar.

As Mr. Dhering walks up the room a sudden lull falls over the eager company, which is immediately followed by a double amount of talking to make up for the momentary silence. For the next few minutes nothing is to be heard but whispered comments on the new arrival, and eager requests for an introduction, till the announcement of dinner settles the confusion, and we adjourn to the dining-room.

I am taken possession of by a fat old judge, who claims acquaintanceship by right of being an old schoolfellow of my father's. Seated between him and a clergyman, who only addresses me in the briefest monosyllables, and who is as deaf as he is dumb, I do not spend a lively time at the table, and I hail with delight the signal Elsie gives for our release.

"What *do* you think of him?" demands Pearl Redgrave breathlessly of me, when we regain the drawing-room.

"Who is 'him'?" I ask mischievously.

"Why, Hugh Dhering, of course. Isn't

he perfectly delightful? Did you ever see any one with such splendidly searching eyes? I declare he makes me feel quite odd when he fixes them on me."

"I'll give you my opinion of him after we have spoken to each other, Pearl," is my amused rejoinder.

"I never was so vexed in my life at not being able to introduce him to you, May," puts in Elsie. "You see, he was rather late, and the room was so awfully full that I had no chance. However, you shall not wait very long for it when the gentlemen come up."

My sister's cherished design seems doomed to disappointment, for just then an unfortunate event happens. A messenger arrives in hot haste with the news that Sir Tristing has been seized with an attack of the heart, and the doctors do not expect him to live the night through. Of course, Mr. Dhering returns with the man, and Elsie, from the summit of victory, is hurled down to the lowest depths of chagrin and despair. One consolation she has, that she has succeeded in doing what her fair rivals have ignominiously failed in, and launched out the hero upon the little portion of the vast ocean of Society as represented by West Blankshire.

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Elsie's ball comes off early in the following week. She has lived in a state bordering on hysterics ever since the night of the dinner-party, for fear Sir Tristing should die and prevent his son from being present. But he still lives, and on the day of the ball her mind is set at rest by a note saying Sir Tristing is much better, and he (Hugh) will be able to come over at night.

Greedon Assembly Rooms have been hired for the auspicious event—there being no apartment spacious enough at Boscombe Lodge—and no expense has been spared to ensure a perfect success.

Andria looks fairly, regal in dead-white silk, with trimmings of heavy gold lace, her dark hair fastened by a simple golden arrow. The style of dress suits her tall, exquisitely formed figure, her great calm brown eyes, and faultless features to perfection. If there is any one thing lacking in her classic beauty, it is colour. She is so still and statuesque that it would be a positive relief to see a tinge of pink in her pure, creamy cheeks, or at least a radiant floweret to nestle somewhere amongst her massive draperies and "call forth the marble into life."

My few charms are completely put in the shade by Andria's. I am rather under the medium height, with big blue-grey eyes, and a nose inclined to be what Tennyson

so happily phrases "tip-tilted." My hair is soft and curly, but it has such a decided shade of red in it that I cannot blind myself to the objectionable fact, though I have long tried hard to do so. My one comfort is my complexion, which is undeniably good. It is dazzlingly, purely white, with what papa calls "a regular maiden's blush" in my cheeks. I am dressed in white tonight, soft white gauze and billowy lace, void of any ornament, save one simple blush rose in my breast and its fellow in my hair; for I am only seventeen, and this is my first ball.

I get more than my share of partners, for when, by chance, there is a vacant space on my programme, Percy Redgrave—who has come over nearly every day since our arrival—fills it up with cagerness. After a rather exhausting galop with him, I despatch him for an ice, and directly his back is turned to procure it I slip into the dimly lit conservatory with a laugh, for I am tired of his unceasingly assiduous attentions. It is really a charming conservatory that adjoins Greedon Assembly Rooms, and the change from the heat and glare into this cool, shady place, made musical with the tinkling of dropping water amongst the leaves, is delightful. Apparently some one else is of the same opinion, for I suddenly discern a tall figure beside me, which upsets my equilibrium so much that I let the card I hold in my hand fall to the ground. The gentleman steps forward politely to pick it up, and I do the same. Simultaneously our hands reach it with a ludicrous result; it has fallen on an iron grating for letting the water run off. Our hands come into contact—there is a faint click, and we have pushed the unlucky card completely through. We both look up laughingly, and then I see that my companion is Hugh Dhering.

"I fear it is irrevocably gone," he says.

"Quite, in such a place as that. I cannot see any signs of it even at the bottom," I answer, peering down into the gloomy depths between the iron bars.

"And I have only made matters worse," he continues ruefully.

"Oh, never mind, it is not of much value; only as it was my programme I shall not know to whom I have promised dances, and if wrong partners claim them I shall be none the wiser."

"Can't you put the names on your fan?"

"I cannot remember them; and besides, my fan is carved wood, with no space for writing."

"What a calamity!" with mock seriousness.

"Is it? I think it promises good fun. One gentleman especially is sure to make a fuss of it, because I shall declare he has made a mistake each time he comes to claim me. It was to escape from him that I came to hide in here."

Mr. Dhering looks amused. "Are you not rather hard?"

"Not a bit; he is the greatest bane of my life."

"Well, if you desire concealment you will not find a better place than this," and pushing aside the drooping boughs of the tree from which he had recently emerged, he conducts me to a low bench and seats himself beside me. "We are quite concealed here, even should the gentleman who has caused you such annoyance enter the conservatory to seek you," is his smiling remark.

His conduct somewhat surprises me, for he, at least, must be ignorant of whom his companion is. Perhaps he divines my thoughts, for he says, "Pardon me if I introduce myself to you. My name is Hugh Dhering, and you, I think, are my hostess's sister, Miss Dugald?"

"Yes, I am. How did you guess it? Elsie and I are not considered alike; and you were not introduced to me last week."

"I did not have that pleasure; but I did not guess who you were. Mrs. Burt pointed you out to me the other evening."

"How extremely impertinent of her!" I laugh.

"Quite the reverse, for I asked her your name, and that of the young lady with you; she was prevented from telling me the latter."

"Was she a tall girl in black tulle and silver, with black hair?"

"The very same. I consider her one of the most lovely women I have ever seen."

A slight smile flits over my lips as I think of Elsie's vexation did she hear those words. "That is Andria Veerholme, my cousin."

"She is very lovely," he repeats.

"Yes, every one admires her, and she is as good and sweet as she is beautiful. She always reminds me strongly of those words of Wordsworth's:—

'A perfect woman, nobly plann'd  
To warn, to comfort, and command.'"

Mr. Dhering smiles, and says, "The first lines of that poem would better describe my thoughts of her the other night:—

'She was a phantom of delight  
When first she gleamed upon my sight :  
A lovely apparition sent  
To be a moment's ornament ;  
Her eyes as stars of twilight fair,  
Like twilights, too, her dusky hair.'"

"I think she resembles that, and my quotation too, Mr. Dhering."

"The next lines are meant for you, Miss Dugald:—

' . . . All things about her drawn  
From May-time and the cheerful dawn :  
A dainty shape, an image gay,  
To haunt, to startle, and waylay.'

You do not know what a picture you and your cousin form together."

I merely laugh and change the subject, for it occurs to me that it is bad taste to converse so freely with a stranger upon matters so nearly concerning myself.

You have travelled a great deal, I believe?" I say.

"Pretty well."

"Where have you been, Mr. Dhering?"

"Over most of Europe and a little in Asia Minor, but my principal time has been spent amongst the prairies and mountains of the Far West."

"And you liked it immensely?"

"It is a glorious life, so free and healthful—only one's own taste to consult and no one to mind."

"How jolly! Do tell me a little about it."

"Would you like it? Imagine camping at night under a clear, cloudless sky studded with countless myriads of stars—stars brighter, more luminous than any you could ever see here. Warmly wrapped in your blanket, thoroughly tired by your day's hard riding, the soft, flower-decked sward makes a bed by no means to be despised. At your feet is the indispensable wood-fire to ward off unpleasant visitors in the shape of wild beasts, though it sometimes is the means of attracting equally unwelcome ones—Indians. Rise with the sun, and oh, what a spectacle is before your eyes! The great red orb slowly ascending out of the east, shedding floods of golden glory over the vast expanse of boundless prairie; the near ground all ablaze with bright starry flowers, countless in multitude and variety of colour. Far, far away in the hazy distance, low, sweeping hillocks rise and fall like waves on the ocean; and farther still, in one long rugged chain, is the dim blue wall that marks the Rocky Mountains. Mount your horse and gallop in wild freedom through the sparkling morning—my word, what a bracer for breakfast it is! Talk of an appetite! I should be ashamed to let you see what I could eat after a ride like that."

This is evidently a favourite topic with Mr. Dhering, for he talks and I listen engrossed, till the sound of approaching voices arrests our attention, and we find, to our dismay, that we have been absent long

enough to have been missed even amongst the crowd.

"I do not think she is here, Elsie."

"Nonsense, she must be here, Dree, for I have searched everywhere else. Naughty girl! she is so thoughtless. I never know what she will do next."

Rather guiltily I emerge from my hiding-place, followed by my cavalier; whereupon, perceiving who is the partner of my absence, a gleam of satisfaction flits across Elsie's face, though she still keeps up a little farce of being angry at my running away from "that poor Percy Redgrave." Then we retrace our steps to the ball-room; Elsie and I first, Mr. Dhering and my cousin—who have been duly introduced—following together. Awaiting us is Percy, with a beaming face and an official letter in his hand.

"What do you think they have just forwarded to me from home? guessing it was important by this," pointing to the letters "On Her Majesty's Service" on the envelope.

"The expected summons to start for Gibraltar, of course," is my cool reply.

"No, indeed, something far better. The order for foreign service is indefinitely postponed!"

"Dear me, how wonderful!"

"Wonderfully good for me. So you are awfully thick with Dhering, I see! Well," sighing, "he's a thoroughly good fellow."

"We have been 'awfully thick'—which is a truly elegant way of expressing it—for the space of thirty-five minutes, or thereabouts," sarcastically.

"Had you not spoken to him before, then?" eagerly.

"No," I answer laconically, as I watch Mr. Dhering and Andria threading their way through the maze of guests, and for the remainder of the night he approaches my side no more.

## CHAPTER II.

**W**E are home again now—have been for some time, after a gay fortnight that followed the ball, in which fortnight we saw a good deal of the "lion."

Before long Mr. Dhering calls on us. Papa takes a great fancy to him, and is always giving him pressing invitations to come over as often as he likes; which, apparently, Mr. Dhering is nothing loth to respond to, for the long summer days seldom pass without him coming at some time or other. Now and then we drive over to see old Sir Tristling, who fails very

last. He is rejoiced to have us, and shares our delight at being shown the interesting antiquities and family relics with which Dhering Chase abounds. Altogether we are a blithe, happy party, for dear father is as young in heart as we are, and our pleasant riding parties and merry combats at lawn tennis do not seem complete without his comely, beaming face and jovial laugh.

No dark shadow of the future mars our enjoyment of the untroubled present; and often, ah! so often, in the after years I look back with sore, terrible yearning to this as the sweetest, happiest period of my existence. But all too soon a break comes in our happy life; papa and I have to fulfil a long-promised visit to some friends in London, while Andria goes to spend the time, during our absence, with Elsie.

Our friends are everything that is kind, and our visit is a most pleasant one, yet I am conscious of a sort of relief when the eight weeks have elapsed and we return to Dugaldston. The old place seems dearer to me than ever, and I experience a sensation of joy and expectation that is somewhat puzzling to myself. I am too happy to analyse the cause, but before long a revelation is to come that divulges all.

Andria is greatly changed; she has become so thin that the grand contour of her Juno-like form is quite lost, and her face is sad and more colourless than ever. Much concerned, I ask if she has been ill. She answers in the negative, turning away to avoid my scrutinising gaze.

"Well, what is the matter, Dree? It must be that you are in love." Then perceiving the ghost of a flush on her face, "Hurrah! that is the secret, is it, miss? A nice young lady you are not to tell me who is the happy 'he.' Come, Dree, 'fess now?"

But she does not respond to my fun, and seeing how really sad and changed she is I do not pursue the subject. After searching about in my own mind for a solution of the mystery, I can only arrive at one conclusion, either justly or unjustly, and that is, that of whatever nature it may be, Elsie is at the bottom of it.

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It has become cold enough for fires, and Dree and I are comfortably ensconced in easy-chairs one day, toasting our feet on the drawing-room fender. She is reading; I am gazing at her pityingly, for she looks wretchedly ill. There are great dark circles round her lustrous eyes; her face is wan and haggard, bearing a mournful expression such as it has never worn before. I wonder more than ever what the hidden

reason can be for such a change, when a light touch on my shoulder causes me to start with a cry of surprise, as I perceive Lieutenant Redgrave standing at my shoulder.

I have not seen him since he rejoined his regiment, and, ungratefully, my first feeling is one of vexation at this unexpected renewal of his attentions; for that, I know, is what his presence means; so I ask sharply, while Andria looks up in amazement, "Why, what on earth brings you here unknown to any one? How did you get in? Have you seen papa?"

"One question at a time, please," he answers smilingly, as he takes my hand. "I came to see you. Peters admitted me; he said you two were here alone, so I came in unannounced."

"You must have crossed the room very gently, Lieutenant Redgrave," remarks Dree.

"Yes. When I opened the door it seemed a pity to disturb so fair a picture—you absorbed in your book, Miss May in a reverie; so I crept softly along, and had been quietly enjoying the scene for some minutes before I made my presence known."

"What a horrid shame to take advantage of our absorption!" I exclaim hotly, heedless of Dree's little "Hush, May!"

"What made you ask for leave?"

Percy Redgrave heaves a reproachful sigh. "I shall not be able to get it again for a long, long time, Miss May," he says slowly.

"Why?"

"Simply because we are ordered on foreign service, and start next week."

"Oh, I am so sorry!" exclaims Andria, warmly. I maintain silence.

"Thank you, Miss Veerholme; it is pleasant to feel one will be missed."

After a momentary pause I remark, "So you are going, after all."

"Yes; the long-deferred farrago has gone forth. I suppose our absence will not affect you in any particular degree, Miss Dugald?" turning hopelessly, so as to face me.

"Well, certainly it won't be a 'she-only-said-the-day-is-dreary' sort of case with me after you are gone," I reply saucily.

"I never presumed it would," is his grave, low rejoinder.

"You can hardly expect it to affect me seriously, you know, considering that you are the only person I am acquainted with in the regiment, excepting two young officers you brought here to dinner one evening." I go on coolly.

"And we stand pretty equally in your

estimation, I should imagine," he mutters bitterly.

I actually laugh. I am so young, and gay, and happy; no real trouble as yet has ever darkened my life to sweeten its thoughtless callousness, and I do not understand this young fellow's love and sorrow one bit. My cousin looks pained. Murmuring something about "uncle," she rises and walks swiftly out of the room.

"Where are you going, Dree?" I call out, preparing to follow her; but Percy puts his hands on my shoulders and firmly places me back into my chair.

I flush hotly. "What did you do that for? How dare you touch me?" is my indignant demand.

He takes no notice of the question. "No, Miss May, you must not go till you hear me once more. You can guess what it is I want to ask—I have asked you once before."

"Yes, you have; I said 'no' then, and I say it now," is my hasty reply, as I spring up and again endeavour to pass him.

My lover seizes my hands and crushes them in his strong, warm grasp. "May, you cannot be so heartless, so utterly without pity as to send me away like this?" he pleads. "Can you never learn to love me, dear? Have you no crumb of hope to give me, if not now, at least of the future? I would be content with so little."

I shake my head in silence.

"Shall I not carry with me over the sea the vision I have dreamt of, thirsted for—the vision of a fair, sweet, grey-eyed girl far away in Old England, who will one day be my wife?"

The trouble in his eager face, all aglow with yearning love, is enough to melt a heart of stone, yet it does not affect me; I only feel cross at his importunity. Many a time since then has this scene come back to me vividly—many a time when my heart has well-nigh broken beneath the weight of the burden that has seemed too heavy to be borne—the large, low-ceiled, old-fashioned drawing-room, warm with the ruddy fire-light flashing over its panelled walls, the white-clad form of a slender, fair-haired girl in the depths of a red velvet armchair, held there by the firm hands of a man with anguished face and bleeding heart. And I had no pity! Oh, Heaven! no pity! Surely the heaviest retribution that can befall a woman has overtaken me since.

"No, Lieutenant Redgrave," I say, "you cannot, for it would be a false vision. Will you have the goodness to let me go? How absurd we should look if any one came in unexpectedly!"

"I verily believe you have no heart," he groans, "or you could never speak like this. Can you never learn to care for me, May?"

"No ; never as you wish."

"Do you pity me, child ?"

"Of course I am very sorry you should be taking this so badly ; and I like you as a friend, and shall miss you, and all that ; nothing—"

He flings my hands passionately from him, and stamps his foot on the ground. "Good heavens ! May, you will drive me mad. Do you not understand, can you not imagine a little of what I endure, that you talk of 'taking this badly,' and mere friendly liking ? You *must* know my very heart is breaking for love of you, yet you sit there with your face unruffled and answer thus."

"That's untrue," I cry audaciously ; "my face is burning. Who could keep it 'unruffled' with you going on so ?" putting my hands up deprecatingly to my flushed cheeks.

"Child, child, you are heartlessly cruel ! What pitiless fate led me to love you, so fair, so cold—"

Impatiently I interrupt him. "That I am sure I don't know ; I never wanted you to love me, so you need not stand staring there as if it were all my fault. Why could you not love Andria, and let everything go on nicely ? She is lovely and good, while I am heartless and cruel, hateful and ugly, and—and—and—" here I become somewhat incoherent, for temper and wounded pride have fairly overcome me now. Having been so completely spoilt, I do not relish the idea of being called unpleasant names by one who has hitherto considered me perfect in his wild adoration.

Percy kneels down beside me, and looks up into my excited face. "Oh, May ! little May !" he says, very gently, "is it possible that you in your innocence are not aware how much more beautiful you are than your cousin ? You are like a sweet wild-rose, fair with the dewy freshness of the morning—radiant with youth's most charming graces. Men have gone mad over a less lovely face than yours, my fair darling. Men will tell you of your beauty over and over again, but none will be so true, none will ever love you with a love so fond, so deep, so lasting as mine. May, dearest one, think of it once more ere you spurn it for ever as a worthless thing."

At last I am touched ; he is so chivalrously tender, so yearning, that my eyes fill with tears. "Oh, Percy," I cry, calling him by his Christian name for the first time, "how hard it is that this should have

happened ! for, indeed, I can never love you in the way you wish."

"Never, darling ?"

"No, never ; I am quite sure."

"Then this is to be the end ?" he whispers huskily.

"The end," I repeat regretfully. "You must learn to forget me, Percy ; I am not worth troubling about. It is much better that you are going away—new scenes and people will help you to forget."

He shakes his head sadly. "Ah, May, dear one, your pity is sweet, but you will never *understand* while you talk about forgetting. Some day, perhaps, when another draws forth sweet music from the chord I have been powerless to touch you will remember what I now feel. Good-bye, May, my one little love ; you will let me kiss you once, dear ?

"It may be for years, and it may be for ever."

We may never meet again."

I am fairly vanquished now ; all my self-possession and indifference have disappeared, and I burst out crying. With my usual impulsiveness I spring up and vehemently kiss his hands, plentifully bedewing them with the tears that fall. "Oh, Percy ! why can't you love me as a sister ? It is all turning out so stupidly, and you do make me so wretched," I sob childishly.

Percy raises his hands to his grave, set lips. "Dear, sweet tear-drops," he says softly, as if to himself, "you have saved me from despair ; you will be my spur to hope and happiness in the far-off future, if not just yet."

Evidently my rash procedure is misleading him, so I speedily determine to destroy any false hopes to which it may have given rise. "No, no ; you are wrong, Percy, totally wrong ; if you were my own brother I should cry just like that."

Percy looks yearningly at my tearful face. "May dear, you have a rose in your bosom—happy little rose ! You will not refuse me that ?"

Without speaking I tear the flower from my dress and place it in his eager hand. Then we hear approaching footsteps. An expression of sharpest agony crosses my lover's face ; a low muttered groan comes from his wrung heart.

"One kiss, May—the first and last," he says. With a swift movement he folds me in his strong arms and presses his lips on my brow ; the next moment he has rushed from the room, and I fall back in my chair, too stunned with sorrow and surprise to move.

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As the time goes on I awake to the disagreeable fact that Hugh Dhering makes no endeavour to renew our former friendship ; an occasional duty call he makes, but of our pleasant homely intercourse there is an end. Papa does not scruple to complain of this "weather-cock conduct," and wonders aloud as to the reason, while I wonder in silence. Whether Andria ever thinks on the subject or not I cannot tell, for her silence is more marked than my own. She is altogether strange and altered lately ; our cosy chats have entirely ceased, because she prefers moping in her own room for hours at a stretch. She is always *distracte* and languid ; her dark eyes—which appear larger, more luminous than ever now her face is so white and thin—are full of a haunting sadness, as if the burden of a great sorrow lay upon her young life. Papa sees it and questions her ; but she answers, with a wan smile, that it is his fancy—"there is nothing the matter."

Matters have been in this highly unsatisfactory state ever since our visit to London : first the change in my cousin ; then Percy Redgrave's departure (and already I miss him more than words can tell). Papa, too, catches the prevailing spirit of dejection and grows morose and fidgety ; the slightest event seems sufficient to upset his usually excellent temper now. Lastly, there is Hugh Dhering's defection, and in my innermost heart I know that this affects me most of all ; for on that never-to-be-forgotten night of my first ball, the "hero" I met was truly "my hero ;" and I love him as the one man of all the world to me. Not that my heart told its secret then and there ; since, gradually, yet firmer and firmer, has love wound its massive cables about me, and none the happier do I feel for it just now.

One day, after an unusually dull morning, I insist on Andria rousing herself up to accompany me in the pony-carriage for a drive. She is sitting listlessly in an armchair by the window, her lace-work lying untouched on her lap.

"Now, I declare, Dree, you *shall* rouse from this wretched state of melancholia that you have got into. It is enough to drive one wild to see you moping so. You never laugh, you seldom talk, you take no interest—"

My cousin interrupts me with a languid smile. "Don't I? I think you are exaggerating, May ; I do laugh when there is anything to laugh at."

"Yes, when you are absolutely forced to ; but in what a manner! ugh! it makes me shiver, it is so unnatural and forced."

"Well, dear, I suppose it is because I am not feeling well."

"Then why don't you see a doctor? Papa is always telling you to."

"A doctor would do no good ; he would not know what to prescribe for, unless for the headaches from which I suffer so often lately."

"Because you do not take exercise. Will you do as I wish now, and come for a drive?"

Andria begins a feeble remonstrance about it being so cloudy and chilly, which I put an end to by running upstairs for her hat and sealskin, and putting them on her myself, after which she can no longer refuse.

Snowflake and Polly, the ponies, stand tossing their heads at the door ; and in a few minutes we are bowling along the quiet country lanes, the crisp autumn wind giving a colour to our cheeks and an impetus to our drooping spirits that even Andria cannot withstand. The woods have donned their varied dresses of golden, russet, and brown ; the roads are dry and light beneath the first touch of the early winter wind. Suddenly the sun bursts out from the grey, lowering clouds, showering rays of golden glory upon the pretty scene beneath. Snowflake and Polly toss their manes as if to share in the general brightness, bounding along in such wild excitement that I can scarcely hold the spirited little creatures in.

"Are you not glad you came instead of moping at home with the sort of 'Patience on a monument smiling at grief' expression that you wore before we started?"

"Certainly it is impossible not to feel exhilarated dashing along through the keen air at this rate. How those ponies do go, May!" she adds. "Are you sure you can hold them in?"

"Oh, I can manage them."

"It is a good pull for you, though ; perhaps it would have been wiser to have brought Henderson."

"It is so miserable to have Henderson stuck opposite us with his arms folded, listening to every word we say ; besides, he is only a boy."

"Well, he is stronger than you or I, and the ponies are used to him."

"They are all right ; they have been in the stable too much, and need a sharp run to cool their mettle. Which way shall we go, Dree?"

"I don't mind."

"Then we will go to Bostal and back by Endon Glen."

"Isn't that too far, May? We shall be away over two hours."

"Never mind ; we are well wrapped up, so it won't hurt us. The road is always so lovely at this time of year." My cousin raises no further objection, and we proceed.

Quickly we reach the quaint village of Bostal, pass through it, and continue our way down the beautiful Glen Road. Before long I repent of my decision, for the distance is greater than I supposed, and my arms ache sadly with holding in the ponies, who, instead of tiring, appear to get wilder and more unmanageable every minute. They are lovely little animals, and generally docile ; but having had scarcely any work lately, they are more spirited than usual.

"Could you take the reins, Andria ? My fingers ache rather."

Andria hesitates. "Oh, May, must I ? I am so nervous of driving fresh horses."

So I keep my place, and strive to do without her aid. I do not apprehend actual danger, but the spot is very lonely, and my strength is pretty nearly exhausted, so it is with something like relief that I observe the figure of a man walking some distance ahead of us.

"Who is that, Dree ? The gait seems familiar to me, but the sunshine, and having to keep watch on these little animals, prevent me from seeing plainly."

Andria does not reply, and glancing round at her, I perceive, to my intense surprise, that she is deadly pale.

"Why, whatever is the matter ? are you frightened ?" I ask.

"Nonsense, May, there is nothing the matter. That—that gentleman is Mr. Dhering, I believe."

It is now my turn to be startled ; I feel my chee's turning scarlet, and my cousin's sudden pallor is quite forgotten in the rush of thoughts this unexpected announcement brings to my mind. When, in a few seconds, we overtake him, and he merely raises his hat and gravely acknowledges our bow, the momentary doubt whether I will stop or not vanishes in a flood of wounded pride, and the words impulsively come, "Did you see what a cold greeting he gave us ? Well, he is strangely changed. I have noticed his avoidance of—" The remainder of the sentence is lost, for a hare has darted across the road before us ; there is a sudden pause, a frightful twist, and the startled ponies tear madly back the way we have just traversed. Frightened and upset, I make a frantic effort to regain a firm hold of the reins, which have slipped from me in the plunge ; but my already numbed fingers refuse to stand this new strain upon them. Again and again I take a fresh grasp—in vain. My whole frame

quivers with nervous excitement, and when, as we wheel round a jagged corner, I see an immense farm waggon lumbering heavily down the narrow hedge-bound lane not a hundred yards ahead, my heart gives one leap and every drop of blood recedes from my face and lips.

Andria utters a low cry as she instinctively lays her hands on the reins ; but our united strength is insufficient to restrain the now uncontrollable ponies. Onward they rush, nearer and nearer the clumsy vehicle, that with the utmost care would be difficult to pass in such a narrow space ; while, to crown our danger, we can see the man who has charge of the team slumbering in the bottom of the empty cart. Desperately we both stand up to pull the harder—a moment's agony, a violent shock that hurls us back into our seats as we are suddenly checked, then we both look up in thankful astonishment to see who our deliverer is.

There he stands, white and grave, firmly holding Snowflake and Polly's excited heads. The waggon has been pulled up close in front ; and the man, now thoroughly aroused from his somnolent condition, is staring in stupid bewilderment at the gentleman who reprobates him so sternly for his carelessness. My cousin leans back and covers her face with her hands in silence ; but my impulsive nature forgets all trivial differences in the gratitude of the moment. Springing from the carriage, I run round to Hugh Dhering's side, and bursting into tears, I chokingly try to thank him for his brave assistance.

"You have saved our lives, Mr. Dhering—saved us from such a dreadful death !" I sob.

Tenderly laying his hand on my shaking arm, he soothes my excitement. "You must not give way ; indeed, you will be quite ill," he says persuasively. "You so brave, too ! I noticed how well you controlled your fears and kept up to the last. Thank Heaven I was here to notice it !" he fervently adds. "Now, dear Miss May, go back to the carriage. I am afraid you will have to put up with my company on your homeward journey, for you are totally unfit to drive at present, and your ponies are by no means conquered yet ; they will need a firm hand over them."

"Oh ! please drive them ; my hands are so numbed with pulling, and my arms ache ; we have come much farther than we intended." I get in with my back to the ponies, pointing to Mr. Dhering to take my former place.

All this time Andria has not spoken ; she has uncovered her face and is sitting

quietly beside Hugh ; but neither attempt to break the silence that quickly falls over us, for as my agitation subsides my embarrassment increases. Those few words, that kindly touch, have thrilled my foolish heart ; and a faint, tremulous ray of hope beams like wintry sunshine through the dark clouds of past neglect and coldness, bringing a happiness—false though it be—which in itself is compensation enough for the afternoon's escapade.

My tongue seldom maintains a lengthened silence ; so, finding my cousin does not speak, I address her reproachfully. "Dree, do you know you have not said one word to Mr. Dhering for saving us ? He ran a great risk with those little rascals, tearing as they were."

Dree's delicate cheeks flush faintly, and she looks annoyed at my remark.

"Pray hush, Miss May," says Hugh.

"Indeed, you have done that for us both, May," replies Dree, coldly. "If I appear ungrateful, Mr. Dhering must attribute it to the confusion and upset, and forgive the forgetfulness. I do not wish to be ungrateful."

Mr. Dhering simply bows in answer, and addresses himself smilingly to me. "Miss Dugald, you will make me very angry if you persist in saying so much of an act that was merely what any one in similar circumstances would have done."

"Indeed, I am not sure they would."

Then he adroitly changes the subject, and we converse upon various matters till we reach Dugaldston, where papa, almost scared to death at our prolonged absence, stands ready with an affectionate scolding on the wide stone steps.

### CHAPTER III.

**I**N November Elsie invites me to stay with her. At another time my answer would have been an indignant refusal, as my cousin is not included in the invitation ; but now, glad to escape from my own thoughts and the depressing effects of 'the melancholy trio'—which is my latest nomination of papa, Dree, and myself—I decide to accept. To my intense surprise, Mr. Dhering is a guest at Boscombe Lodge. Elsie smiles at my astonishment, softly purring something about having mentioned to him who was coming, so no one could wonder at the attraction of the needle when the magnet was near. "Voilà ! Are you satisfied, May ?"

At which extremely vague speech I burst out laughing, and ask whatever she is driving at. But she only looks mysterious,

and tells me to get some colour in my cheeks, which have become as white as Andria's. "And you know I never did admire those pale, insipid sort of complexions," she adds impressively.

We are rather quiet for Elsie ; but the time passes swiftly and pleasantly. At a week's end my drooping spirits have completely revived ; though, as my sister does not forget to remark, they were at a terribly low ebb when I arrived. In fact, she alludes to this so often, and is so tender about my health, that I am completely puzzled, for Elsie was never particularly affectionate, and certainly I never was such a source of anxiety to her as at the present.

One day we are sitting at luncheon, when Mr. Burt says, "Has your father sold those abominable little wretches that nearly cost you your life, May ?"

I always have disliked my pompous and rather thick-headed brother-in-law, and this remark about my favourites coming from him rouses my ire very quickly.

"Sold Snowflake and Polly !" I ejaculate, in horror. "It shows you know but little of papa to ask such a question. Why, I love them as well as human beings—much better than I do many."

"They ought to be sold. I told your father they were too frisky for a girl to drive some time ago."

"My father is the best judge of that," I return coldly.

Mr. Burt laughs aggravatingly. "That is because he lets you do as you like. Were I in his place, such folly as keeping two plaything ponies that are unsafe to drive would soon be put an end to, I can tell you."

An angry retort is on my lips, but Elsie pours oil upon the troubled waters by saying, "Oh, they are not really unsafe, Edward : they were unusually fresh on this occasion ; besides, May is an expert and fearless driver."

"As I can testify," puts in Mr. Dhering, quietly. My brief anger is quite disarmed by his unexpected approval.

"Indeed, my exploits on that occasion were hardly such as to deserve these encomiums on my capabilities as a Jehu," I say deprecatingly ; "for the reins slipped, and—"

"That was after the ponies turned ; I watched how well you managed them before that unlucky hare darted out, and have since marvelled how you did it, for you were in a dreadfully exhausted state when they stopped."

"That afternoon, or *something else*," remarks Elsie, emphasising the last two

words, "has made a tremendous difference in May's appearance."

"Did make," corrects Mr. Dhering. "A week has made a great change in you again, Miss May; it has brought back your old bloom and vivacity, which I was sorry to miss when you came here. You were looking quite sad and ill."

"Yes, your cheeks are not good at keeping a secret, May," laughs Elsie. "Now, are they not shocking telltales to lose their roundness and bloom for so long and then pick them up again in one short week?"

Mr. Burt smiles in what he considers a knowing manner across the table at no one in particular, and vaguely murmurs between two sips of his choice Burgundy, "Ah, indeed! confounded odd, I must say!"

"I am much better for the change," I acknowledge. "We have seemed frozen up at home lately, though I could not tell you why; everything has been wrong and horrid, and I have had a little worry too. As for telltales, Elsie, what tales do you suppose my cheeks can have to tell?" I add innocently. Then I catch Hugh Dhering's clear grey eyes fixed upon me with an earnest, half-annoyed expression that brings great burning blushes into my cheeks, while Elsie vexes me beyond endurance by laughing lightly and taking my hands protectingly in hers.

"Aren't they telling a tale now? Never mind, May, I congratulate the good taste that—but you will not return the compliment to me if I continue in this strain; so as we have finished luncheon we will go upstairs, pet, and give your cheeks a chance to cool."

Angrily snatching away my hand, I dart one indignant glance at her and march majestically from the room, intending to indulge in a hearty cry of vexation in the privacy of my own chamber. My intention is never carried into effect, for just as I reach the staircase the dining-room opens and closes after some one who follows me. Before I can fly a detaining hand is laid upon my shoulder, and the voice of Hugh Dhering says kindly, "Miss May, can you spare me a few minutes in the library? We shall not be interrupted there, and I have something of importance to say to you."

Still feeling ruffled and rebellious, I am half inclined to refuse his request; but the cool, firm manner in which he takes my obedience for granted by leading the way, influences me more than a good amount of persuasion would do, and I follow him curiously into the library.

Quietly Mr. Dhering closes the door and

joins me in my position upon the hearth-rug before the blazing fire. "I felt so sorry for you just now," he begins; "it is a mystery to me how some people can be so regardless of the finer sensibilities of others."

Expecting this is not the only thing he has brought me in to hear, I merely shake my head and smile.

"I will not keep you in any unnecessary suspense, Miss May," he says simply, after a moment's pause. "I have to ask you if you will be my wife?"

It is so sudden, so unexpected on my part, that it literally strikes me dumb; for an instant my head becomes dizzy, and the furniture seems to swim. Surely it is the strangest, most abrupt wooing a girl ever had! yet my heart throbs wildly in great, mad leaps; a new, sweet sense of hope fulfilled, of happiness gained, steals over me, gradually usurping the first shock of surprise. Through all the dimness I am only conscious of one thing—this man, whom I love so dearly, so hopelessly till now, has asked me to be his wife.

His next words arouse me from my silence. "Well, dear, have you had time to consider your answer?" very gravely.

Giving him one swift, shy glance, it startles me to see how sad his eyes are; how pale, and set, and drawn is his face. All shyness vanishes before my sudden fear; drawing closer to him, I lay my hand on his arm. "What is the matter? Are you ill?" I ask breathlessly.

His brow knits in a frown of vexation, and he tries to smile; but the attempt is not a successful one, for the drawn look remains, and the smile is forced and unnatural. "I am not well to-day, my head is splitting; so if I do not appear over-cheerful you will know the reason. Nothing to be alarmed at." There is another longer and rather awkward pause, then, "Come, little woman, you have not yet answered my question," he says.

The colour is fast flooding those "tell-tale cheeks," and my head droops shyly before the steady gaze of his calm, clear eyes. Mine is a peculiar position, and I realise it keenly; without anything further to soften down the bare, terse question, it seems almost unmaidenly to give my answer point-blank, so I ask stupidly--

"What question?"

And he reiterates patiently, "Will you be my wife?"

Then the words come very softly, "I will."

My lover does not attempt to touch me; he stands perfectly still, and says: "Thank you, dear. I will try to make you happy."

Your slightest wish shall henceforth be my law ; you shall want for nothing—everything your heart desires and money can procure shall be yours. There—"

"Oh, Hugh!" I interrupt yearningly, "do not speak of such things. It is *yourself* alone I care for ; all else is worth nothing besides," and truly my heart yearns with a hungry yearning towards this man whose wooing is so cold and bare.

"What a tender little woman you are ! so loving, and bright, and fair," and then he turns away, sighing heavily. My love for him is so strong that all he does will be right to me now ; yet, as he stands gazing absently out on the hard frost-bound garden, the remembrance of that other wooing flashes over my mind with a sharp pang. The burning, passionate words, the eager, love-lit face, the anguished, heartfelt sorrow—how different the two ! Here is no word of love—nothing but a brief offer of marriage, unembellished and —ah ! I have owned it since—cold. Hugh Dhering has not offered to kiss me—not so much as even touched my hand ; and in spite of it I am happy—fervently, foolishly happy, for why should Hugh wish to marry me unless for love ? There is no question of unequal fortunes, for he is rich, and my dowry will be no mean one. No question of the influence of friends, for he is his own master, and were he not, he is not the man to take a wife simply to *please* any one. So I give myself up to the "sweet, sweet present," content to let the unknown future unravel its secrets as it comes along.

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Six weeks later we are married. In accordance with Hugh's wish, the wedding has been hurried, and this arrangement falling in fully with Elsie's desires, the trousseau has been purchased and everything made ready as quickly as money and Paris could procure them. Two days after our marriage a sharper attack than usual carries off Sir Tristing in a few hours. So it is that, after a six months' tour on the Continent, we return and settle down at Dhering Chase as Sir Hugh and Lady Dhering.

My husband is everything the most exacting of wives could desire ; my comfort is his first concern—my wishes his law. Nothing but kind and gentle words ever fall from his lips to me. I ought to be a very happy woman ; I have youth, wealth, the man of my choice, my health is splendid, and yet there is something wanting. A cloud scarcely bigger than a man's hand is gradually spreading itself over the blue heavens of my life ; a vague, inde-

finable sense of uneasiness possesses me, at times filling me with unreasoning alarm and affecting my naturally buoyant spirits.

The first shadow fell upon me after a conversation with Hugh. We had been married several days and my husband had not once offered to kiss me. Never for a moment had I regarded his love for me as the absorbing, passionate sentiment of my own heart for him, so this particular omission did not strike me during our engagement ; but ever since the hour when we were made man and wife it had caused me pain.

We were sitting alone and I had crept up to Hugh's side. "Hugh !" I whispered timidly.

He did not hear my voice. "Are you tired, dear ?" he asked, laying his hand on my head.

"No."

My courage almost failed me till Hugh said, "Excuse me for a few moments, dear. I have to write a letter to the steward."

Then seeing the chance was slipping from me, I nestled my head on his arm to hide the burning blushes, and said hurriedly, "Hugh, do you know you have never yet kissed me ?"

My husband of four days heaved a weary sigh. Raising my drooping head till my brow was level with his face, he touched it lightly with his lips. "One must not measure affection by the number of one's kisses in this world," he answered carelessly, as if the matter were too trifling to notice.

For awhile we sat in silence ; then the sobs that would not be controlled threatening to make themselves heard, I made some slight excuse and quitted the room.

#### CHAPTER IV.

 LSIE would like to celebrate our home-coming with a ball and general festivities, but the recent death of Sir Tristing forbids any display. I feel pleased to have the chance of beginning our new life without the unsympathising gaze of strangers ; and at my special request Andria is asked to be our first and only guest. It is almost like a resuscitation of the old happy times when she comes ; my spirits grow buoyant and my heart content, while the dreaded shadow takes to itself wings and flees away. My cousin seems to have got over her trouble, whatever it may have been ; her soft bloom and contour have returned, and with them her cheerfulness, though the latter only partially, for at times a sadness

lurks in her smile, and speaks from her eyes, perceptible enough to me, though others may not observe it. Even grave Hugh—and he is far graver than I ever thought him—laughs at my gay sallies, and is altogether brighter than I have yet seen him.

The only drawback to my full enjoyment is the fact that my husband and Andria do not appear to care for each other; they are perfectly agreeable, but far too formally polite for genuine friendliness. Very often I am reminded of that memorable drive when Andria displayed such extraordinary dislike for Hugh. I am disappointed and surprised at this, for they are both so clever and elevated in mind and pursuits that I expected each would recognise in the other a kindred spirit. In truth, I sometimes wonder, with a little pang, that my husband did not fall in love with Andria, she seems so much more suited to his deep, earnest nature and studious ways than poor, little, light-hearted, simple I.

One morning Dree and I have taken our work to the park, when Hugh joins us with a proposal. "Would you not enjoy an hour or two on the lake?"

"Oh, by all and every means," I cry, springing up. "Wouldn't you, Dree?"

Dree gladly assents, and soon we have all three taken our places in the pretty pleasure-boat that my husband has named "Mayflower," in honour of me. The scene is a very fair one this lovely summer's day—the clear blue waters shimmering gently in the hot sun; the smooth grassy banks sloping from the extensive deer-park on either side, rendered cool and shady by great drooping trees and glossy shrubs. Here and there a graceful swan comes proudly sailing towards us for the biscuits and cake we never fail to bring.

"Isn't this jolly, Dree?" I remark, lazily lying back on the velvet-cushioned seat, my broad-brimmed straw hat tilted over my eyes to keep the glare out.

"Yes; only too hot."

"Well, certainly Hugh does look as if he were slowly evaporating; but you appear as cool as a cucumber."

"Rowing is no joke on such a day as this," returns Hugh, wiping his brow.

"Poor boy! I can't offer to relieve you, for rowing is not one of my accomplishments."

"I wish Sir Hugh would allow me to take an oar—this heat is so trying."

"Thank you, Miss Veerholme, I would rather remain as I am. It would injure you severely to exert yourself in such almost tropical weather," replies Hugh.

"Sir Hugh" and "Miss Veerholme," I

exclaim pettishly. "What awful nonsense! Are not you two cousins now? I cannot think why you are so silly; one would imagine you were strangers, behaving as you do."

To my astonishment, my husband is gazing at me with pained, questioning eyes, flushing painfully the next moment as he bends low over his oar to conceal his too-evident embarrassment.

Bluntness and plain-speaking have ever been amongst my many faults.

"Why, I have made you quite uncomfortable, Hugh!" I laughingly declare.

Andria bends her head over the side of the boat in silence, but my husband says sharply, "You forget your good manners, May, in such personal remarks."

They are the first hasty words he has ever spoken to me, and I shrink before them as so many barbed arrows. A lump rises in my throat, and the country swims before my eyes in unshed tears. My cousin, with her sweet womanly tact, is conversing on various topics with Hugh, and in a few minutes my natural lightness prevails, and I am able to join in.

"Look, May! what a luxuriance of your favourite water-lilies!" smiles Dree, pointing to them.

"Oh, how glorious!" Up I spring, tossing my hat into the bottom of the boat. "I must have some, I adore them! Do stop here, Hugh," entreatingly.

Quite restored to good humour, Hugh laughs at my excitement and accedes to my request, while I proceed to gather a great armful of the lovely wax-white blossoms.

"There, that is enough; row on, Hugh," I say.

"You look like a picture of Undine, in your white dress and those lilies," remarks Dree.

"You look very pretty, dear," says my husband, admiringly.

The little compliment completely restores my equanimity, and casts the last unpleasant effect of the slight preceding incident away. "I will weave a wreath, and amuse you by decking myself like mad Ophelia," I announce gaily. So I loosen my red-gold hair till it floats in massive waves below my waist, and place the wet, dewy blossoms amongst its folds and in my bosom, the others laughing merrily at my childish freak.

"May, May, you will never be anything more than a happy child, over whom sorrow has no power, I verily believe. That it may ever be so is my fond prayer," tenderly murmurs Andria.

"Amen to that. Though I think my

wife has suffered, sorrow has touched her," says my husband, gravely.

A minute I sit pondering over the meaning of his words; then I am interrupted by "Prithee why so grave, Ophelia?" from Hugh; and I carry on my nonsense. Standing up, I clasp my hands across my breast, and sing, in a wild minor key, Ophelia's sad ditty:—

"They bore him barefac'd on the bier;  
Hey non nonny, nonny, hey nonny:  
And on his grave rain'd many a tear."

The boat gives a sudden lurch—I lose my balance and fall heavily to one side. In a moment the frail structure has turned over like a cockle-shell, and we are struggling in the water! Two or three frantic efforts to swim, totally unavailing in my blind terror; a loud gurgling in my ears, and I feel myself sucked down, down into the clear, still depths of the pitiless water. One long, agonised shriek, as all the preciousness of life and awful horror of death burst fully upon me. Ah, dear Heaven! is there no escape? A last look round before my eyes close for ever beneath the treacherous wavelets, but no help is near. Then merciful unconsciousness comes to my relief.

When my suspended senses begin slowly to return, I am lying on the grassy bank-side, apparently alone. I have a confused, dizzy supposition that Hugh saved me and must have gone for aid, when a slight noise causes me to turn my head. Alas for the sight that meets my bewildered eyes! A few yards away lies the still, deathlike form of my cousin Andria; around her, tightly pressing her to his heart, are—my husband's, arms! An intervening bush partly obstructs my view, but every word that is uttered rings out in bitter distinctness on my listening ear.

"Andria, my darling, my only love, open your dear eyes once more! Look at me, darling! Oh, Andria, you cannot—cannot be dead!" There is a ring of anguished pain in his voice; no word or thought for the wife he left lying as prone and lifeless as the woman he holds in his arms; all his grief and anxiety are for her—his "only love." Can this be my quiet, undemonstrative husband—this man who is uttering passionate words of love, pouring warm kisses—yes, the kisses he has been so chary of—on my cousin's white face, as if by so doing he would restore the life to her inanimate frame? Heavier and heavier grows my poor heart as the fatal truth is forced upon it.

Presently Andria uncloses her eyes, and a faint colour tinges her cheeks as she

awakes to the consciousness of her resting-place. "Thank Heaven, I have saved you!" exclaims Hugh, fervently. "Oh, what agony whilst I thought you were dead, my darling, my darling!"

Feebly my cousin speaks. "Where is May? Is she safe?" So *she* is the first to remember me!

"Yes, she is sa'e. We must go to her." As they approach, Andria leaning heavily on his arm, I close my eyes and feign to be just recovering from the swoon. Without speaking, Hugh raises my unresisting form and places it restingly against a thick shrub. Then he says, "You are both safe—both safe. Remain there while I go for assistance," and feeling unable to do anything else, we silently obey.

I feel strangely calm—quite equal to talking quietly to my agitated cousin about our fearful danger and consequent deliverance, until the carriage arrives with servants and warm rugs, and we are conveyed, shivering, to the house.

Being naturally strong, I do not feel the effects of the shock so much as Andria, who has to keep her bed for several days. The first morning she comes downstairs again I am sitting working on the stone terrace outside my boudoir window. The rich silk curtains prevent me from seeing her enter the room, but before long I am made aware of her presence in a painfully disagreeable manner.

"Hush, Hugh!" says her soft voice, "you must not speak of that now—it is all past. Do you forget your wife? Your love is hers now—hers alone. It would break her tender heart to guess at this. It is too late now to discover your second fancy is as fleeting as your first," she adds bitterly. Quite clearly her voice is borne out to me through the wide-open French window. What can I do? There is no other mode of escape save through the room in which they sit. Shame, pride, and grief forbid me disclosing my proximity, for it would be impossible to do so without them knowing at once I must have overheard; I dare not even move out of earshot, for the terrace only stretches in one direction that is seen plainly by the occupants of the boudoir. So I sit on behind the sheltering curtain and strive not to listen.

"Surely it is not for *you* to accuse me of fickleness, Andria; you know quite well I do not love my wife—that I only married her out of sheer pity. You had cast me off; I was mad, desperate. When Mrs. Burt told me that May was wearing her young life out for love of me, and asked her to stay at Greedon to prove her words, I saw how true it was, for the poor child,

was sad and altered, and I asked her to marry me. Heaven help her! she accepted."

It is more than mortal woman can do to be indifferent to such words, and I take my hands from my ears and listen with the regardlessness of desperation to the remainder.

"Bitterly, bitterly do I regret it," he continues. "It was cruel and unjust to her, yet I did it for the best. I feel the life of deceit keenly, for it is so; though as Heaven is my witness, I have never wronged her by thought nor word till that mad moment when I saw you, my only beloved one, lying cold and still. All sense of honour fled away at the sight—everything but the love I have tried so hard to crush ever since the day I swore those false vows at the altar beside the unfortunate girl who is my wife. That love revived then in all its old wildness. Oh, my—"

Again he is checked by my cousin's stern "Hush! There is some terrible mistake, Hugh. I do not understand what you say."

"Do not you understand your own change of mind?"

"I have never changed my mind."

"Not even when you accepted Lieutenant Redgrave?" demanded Hugh, bitterly.

"Accepted Lieutenant Redgrave? I? You—you—surely you did not misunderstand? It was May he asked to marry him, not me."

"May!" almost shouts my husband. "May! Are you sure?"

"I could not very well mistake, Hugh," sadly.

"Then if this be true, my wretched life is doubly cursed indeed. Oh, Andria, there has been treachery somewhere—black, foul treachery!"

"How could it have been?" asks my cousin, faintly.

I cannot tell. Your cousin, Mrs. Burt, told me your liking for me was a mere fancy, not love; that your heart's true love had long since been given to Lieutenant Redgrave. He had asked you to be his wife, and you had given him sufficient cause to hope, but had made no promise."

"Ah!" breaks from Andria in a long, deep-drawn sigh.

"She said you told her of my offer of marriage and your acceptance of it, but now you implored her to break the truth to me, which was that you had been deceived by a passing fancy for me—that you had found out your mistake before it was too late. She said you still loved Percy

Redgrave truly, and always had done, though for a time you were dazzled by my position and wealth. You had always admired splendour and rank, and as Redgrave's wife you would have neither. That I never believed, Andria; fickle you might—I supposed, *must* be—mercenary, scheming, never. I asked if I might see you. Your cousin vehemently refused, saying it would nearly kill you; you were already crushed with shame and remorse, and your one appeal was that I would take her message as final, and spare you the humiliation of an interview. Of course I granted it, but I wrote a letter, which she promised to give to you."

"I never had it."

"What could I do but believe her? She was your cousin—a lady—my hostess. Yet, O Heaven! Andria, do not tell me she lied?"

There is a moment's pause; then, "I tell you she lied, foully, cruelly lied," from Andria.

My husband mutters an imprecation. "Let me tell you all," he says, in a hard, unnatural voice. "From that hour I have been a changed, blighted being. I awaited our next meeting in frenzied eagerness, hoping against hope to find it was all a mistake. Alas! the fatal truth was stamped upon your very countenance. Your eyes were stricken and cold, your cheeks pale; you shunned me as you would a viper. Then I no longer doubted. You know the wretched sequel—how subsequently Mrs. Burt invited me to her house, where I found May was also a guest; how, when I mentioned to her my regret at seeing the sad change in her sister's appearance, she told me, with streaming eyes, that 'May, her little tender May,' loved me with her whole heart, and was fading away before our eyes with grief at my indifference; then she finished up by saying she feared my love could never be given to May; but was she, 'poor innocent child,' to be sacrificed for one who had proved faithless—nay, worthless? Sternly I checked her—she has never dared to slander you to me since—but her words sank deep into my heart. It was true, May was altered; she had grown thin and pale. I thought of what I was suffering myself. I could make this girl, who was suffering as keenly, happy; so, caring little what became of my own existence, I asked her to be my wife."

"Hugh! Hugh!" moans Andria. "Ah, the misery one wicked woman can work! Elsie has done this to separate us. I remember how she wished her sister to become your wife—how triumphant she

was at your engagement to her ; also—but it is of no avail to recall it now."

"Of no avail indeed, when our lives are spoiled!" exclaims Hugh—"spoiled by the treachery of a woman ! How was it you gave me up, Andria ? what made you spurn me ? what made your cheeks haggard and dimmed your eyes that night—that last fatal night at Boscombe Lodge ?"

"Ah ! Hugh, I too have suffered. One day—it was about six weeks after I came to stay with Elsie—she came into my room, and taking my hand in hers, with averted head she told me you had commissioned her, sorely against her will, to tell me what a terrible mistake you had discovered our engagement to be ; for a terrible fact had been forcing itself upon you day by day since it had taken place—it was not I you really loved, it was my cousin May. My beauty had charmed and fascinated you, but your heart was really hers."

I hear my husband start up and stamp his foot. "And you believed it, Andria ? You credited such base lies unquestioningly ?" he demands hotly.

"Stay, Hugh !" she returns soothingly, "hear me out before you blame me. At first I received her words with bitter scorn, though even then I did not consider her capable of uttering falsehoods. She took my indignation very calmly, and said, 'I freely forgive any little ebullition of temper, or any unkind doubts of my veracity, Dree dear, for you are naturally terribly upset. I am not surprised myself, for men do not love like women, and I always fancied Mr. Dhering preferred May in reality. All I ask is, wait until tomorrow and you will see for yourself.' I passed a night of such intense agony that I could not rise until the following afternoon — then we met. You remember several guests were present. I could not tell who they were ; your form was the only one my eyes searched for and found, sitting apart in the shadow of the window-curtain. The same change that you saw in me deceived me in you. You looked years older in those few hours ; your scared, haggard face—your pointed avoidance of me, all confirmed my worst fears. What else but the truth of Elsie's statement could have wrought such an alteration ? At dinner-time I could endure the strain no longer ; reason tottered, every one seemed to fade and vanish away ; my brain whirled, I fell forward, and, as you know, I was carried fainting from the table. When I left my bedroom a week later, you had gone. I waited in dreary, hopeless anguish for some word or sign from you, but nothing came. Hard, very hard I tried to bear my

sorrow unnoticed, but both my uncle and May perceived something was wrong. I never told them of my illness at Elsie's ; and she, too, was willing to be silent. Then, long weeks afterwards, May paid that visit to Greeden, and came back to Dugaldston as your betrothed wife. I knew indeed your love for me—for you must have loved me once, Hugh—was dead then."

"No, no, my darling, not dead—never dead, but living, burning, crushing the vitality out of me week by week, changing me into a grave, saddened, prematurely old man. Oh, love ! love ! how could that woman have done this ? How dare she tamper with our lives' happiness like this ?" My husband ceases abruptly, and then a terrible sound breaks upon my ears—the sound of a strong man sobbing.

I cannot wholly repress a wail of anguish.

"Don't, Hugh, don't !" sobs Andria, chokingly. "It is all past and gone, dear—gone for ever."

"And it might have been," sighs Hugh. "Oh, is there anything sadder in all the wide world than 't might have been'?"

It is getting too much for me ; if the dreadful interview continues much longer I shall be obliged to make my presence known, for the awful tension is too great for me to bear. Already my efforts to conceal my violent agitation are nearly useless. But help is at hand ; there is a tap at the boudoir door, and a maid enters with Andria's luncheon on a tray.

In my cousin's present state of excitement her weakness is forgotten ; she springs up from the lounging-chair as if she were perfectly well, and hastily bidding the astonished girl to follow her with it to her own room, she rushes swiftly out of the apartment. In a few moments my husband goes downstairs and I am set free.

## CHAPTER V.

**N**EED I say it ? My life has become utterly wretched. My resolve is irrevocably taken : I will never add to my husband's grief and shame by betraying the knowledge I have gained within this last long, dreary week. At first it seems impossible not to divulge the secret that has destroyed my happiness for ever on earth ; then a dull, lethargic despair settles down upon me, and I manage neither by word nor deed to give rise to any suspicion. It could do no good to either of us now, I ponder sadly, and I was always such a coward at scenes.

As the days pass on there is nothing in my husband's or Andria's manner to show aught of the terrible tragedy hidden away in each heart. Perhaps they are more distant, more chillingly polite in their daily intercourse, nothing more. But all happiness has gone from amongst us; there is no more laughter, and but few smiles.

Quietly, in a calm, uneventful manner, we pass our time—Hugh nearly always out, or occupied with the estate affairs; Andria and I reading or working together in the park when it is fine, in the house if wet. An occasional ride or drive varies the monotony, or perhaps a few visits to make or return.

Visibly I droop and fade under the weight of the sorrow that eats like a canker at my heart. Friends who come to see us scarcely recognise in the pale, listless woman, with heavy, mournful eyes and hollow cheeks, who bears the envied name of "Lady Dhering," the once gay, careless May Dugald, brimming over with life, and bloom, and buoyant spirits. Ah! verily I can understand why Andria lost her health and animation long ago—why she, too, was changed, and silent, and wan!

One afternoon two ladies call who were staying with Elsie when Andria was there during our visit to London. I receive them alone, for Andria is out, and Hugh, as usual, busy. Mrs. Carrington is not a favourite of mine, and the first few minutes drag by somewhat heavily. Suddenly she says, "I and my sister have been talking about you, Lady Dhering; rather a liberty, don't you consider?" playfully.

"That depends," I answer, smiling. "Did you not find it very warm walking to-day?" I add, for I have no wish to be drawn into a personal discussion.

My visitor is not to be balked. "Yes, rather; I almost wish we had used the carriage. To return to what I was saying, though. Do you know we are shocked—yes, I may say shocked, to see you looking so ill. Have you had medical advice?"

"Oh, there is not the least necessity for such a thing, Mrs. Carrington," coldly. "My constitution is splendid; but it had to stand a pretty severe shock a short time since, and perhaps my strength has not returned fully as yet."

"Ah, you allude to that dreadful boat affair!" she ejaculates; while her sister softly clasps her hands and turns her eyes up in horror, murmuring faintly, "Dreadful!"

"But—but it is not merely that you look delicate, my dear," continues my tormentor, mysteriously. "Your spirits, your gay,

brilliant spirits are nowhere," flourishing her hand to illustrate her point the better. "I am years older than you, my dear, and *I know* the world. Is it quite wise, do you think, to have your—your cousin here so much?"

A crimson tide dyes my neck and face up to my very hair; drawing my slight form up proudly, I say with a dash of my old fire, "Doubtless it is owing to my own obtuseness, Mrs. Carrington, but I really fail to comprehend your meaning."

She flushes a little in return, but is not baffled, and there is mingled spite and curiosity in her voice as she says, "You must not be offended, Lady Dhering; what I say is for your own good. Poor young creature! you have no mother living, and dear Mrs. Burt is seldom with you. I have heard your cousin is to live here, is it true?"

Tortured past bearing, my reply is very abrupt. "I must decline to answer."

Mrs. Carrington rises, offence and chagrin written on her face. "Well, Lady Dhering, I can say no more; I have done my duty, and it is your own fault that you take it in the light you do. Are you aware that I was at Boscombe Lodge when Miss Veerholme was?"

Oh! what is coming? My face grows pale—my hands are clenched in dread and agony. Will she never cease her torture? My answer is incoherently given, as I instinctively glance towards the door.

Mrs. Carrington interprets my look aright. "I will not detain you longer, Lady Dhering," she says deliberately. "Shall I tell you, in parting, what remark I made to your husband when I heard of his engagement to you? I said, 'May you be happy, Mr. Dhering; but' it is well to be off with the old love before you are on with the new." Good-bye, Lady Dhering, I hope your health, and spirits, will improve. Come along, Georgie," and that meek echo of herself prepares to obey. Not a sound issues from my dry lips; they barely move, as I haughtily incline my head, without noticing the outstretched hand before me. I ring the bell; the footman opens the door, and the two ladies depart. I do not expect Mrs. Carrington will ever visit Dhering Chase again.

So it has come to this. My "sacred, sorrowful secret is the property of odious, mean scoundrels like this woman! As if it were not heavy enough to bear, this added weight, this cruel, bitter sting comes to make it worse. Throwing myself down on the sofa, I bury my aching head amongst the soft cushions, and begin to cry. How palpable their love must have

been for such people to have seen it, I ponder ; and at the thought the sobs come thicker and faster, until my form is shaken convulsively, and I cry, "This is too much, too much ! I cannot, will not bear to be questioned and pitied by such hateful people."

There is a hurried step across the room, and my husband bends over me in anxious surprise, "May, May, what is this about ? You are sobbing as if your heart would break. Tell me, dear, what is the matter?"

But I draw myself away from his protecting arms, with a shudder, as I recall how false the proffered embrace must be, and silently shake my head.

"Something ails you, dear. I must know what it is?"

It is evident some reason will have to be given to satisfy him. "That odious Mrs. Carrington has been here, Hugh. She is my especial aversion, and, as usual, her remarks were rude and unkind."

I am scarcely prepared to see my husband's start of annoyance, as he mutters— "Horrid woman !" Then aloud, "You had better give up her acquaintance, May."

"Yes," I reply, wearily, "I mean to do so."

My husband is very tender with me, but he does not ask again what has upset me so much in Mrs. Carrington's conversation. In a few minutes Andria comes in, and she, too, is very anxious, and would soothe and pet me as if I were a little child ; but I do not permit her, for this sympathy seems so hollow and mocking. How can it be otherwise when my wretched existence is the only bar to their happiness? Would they not rather hail its end with relief—perhaps a little sorrow and regret—and then joy ; and I sadly think it will not be long before the obstacle is removed, as I gaze tearfully down at the little white finger over which the wedding-ring slips so easily now, and the dress, which, with so many others, has required taking-in more than once to fit my slender figure.

I believe I was more miserable about this time of my life than I need have been. Those two, whose sorrows and injuries were as great as mine, were, at least, loyal and true to their hearts' core. I know now that both, in their way, loved me truly—that both would have endured anything rather than give me pain. All this was learnt in the after years—

"In life's sad, sorrowful time."

Meanwhile I smarted impatiently beneath the fresh, sore chafing of the wound. My wayward, yearning heart was stronger than pride, and I was starving for one crumb of

love from the man who, alas ! had given it all to another—in whose heart I had, if any, only a second place.

Oh, Elsie, my sister, could you have foreseen the wreck your selfish ambition has made, you would surely have never acted the part you did ! Would you not have thrown pride to the winds sooner than have crushed three lives by your treachery ? would you still have had no pity ? But my sister answers not, and the dreary wail of my own heart is the only sequel to my cry—"Too late—too late!"

"Do you want anything from the village, May ? I am going to match some wool."

"Nothing, thanks," languidly.

"Won't you come too ?" asks Andria.

"I feel too fatigued after my ride."

My cousin bends over me and kisses my brow. "You get tired very quickly now, darling," she sighs.

I turn my head impatiently away. "Pray do not harp upon that everlasting topic," I say ungraciously.

Never harsh, never impatient with me, trying though I feel I am, Andria smiles sweetly as she replies, "Well, dear, I must start, for it is an hour's walk there and back."

"There is no need to hurry ; it is only three o'clock."

"Is that all ?" looking at her watch. "I can sit with you a short time, then, if you like."

"Yes, do, Andria ; I am so cross and peevish, I hate myself, and you always soothe me."

So she seats herself beside me, and lays her graceful head lovingly against my shoulder. "May dear," she begins quietly, "I heard from uncle this morning, and I fancy he finds Dugaldston very dull without his 'little girl.' He is so kind, he will not mention it in your letters, for fear of making you unhappy."

"Oh, Dree !" I exclaim, sitting bolt upright, and clasping my hands in my fervency, "do you think—do you mean papa wants me to go home ? Oh, I should so love it ! The dear, dear old place ; and my own darling old kind papa !" Tears spring into my eyes, and Andria's are not dry.

"No ; I did not exactly mean that," she says hesitatingly. "Are you so home sick already, darling ?"

"Oh, so home-sick !" I cry, like a weary, banished child. "I did not think I was, till now ; your speaking so has brought the longing, oh ! so badly, Dree."

"Darling, I do not like to encourage it. You have not been married long, and to go back now would—would—I hardly can tell you, May; but your husband—remember. Oh, my dear, don't leave him so soon; stay by him. If you went you would want to make the visit so long—do not try it."

Knowing what I do, I marvel at my cousin's pure, sweet fervency. Instinctively I guess at her meaning. Heaving a sigh, I say, "You are always right, Andria; it is better to wait for that happy, happy pleasure. What were you going to say before I interrupted you?"

"Would it not be right and kind for me to cut my visit rather short, for uncle's sake?"

So down-hearted and weary I am that my objections are very faint. "You have been here so short a time!"

"More than five weeks, dear!"

"I am not so selfish as to wish to keep you from papa; he will not miss me when you are with him again, Dree. Yes, I think you had better go."

"Don't look so sad, May," implores my cousin. "You make me very miserable."

I conjure up a smile, and tell her she is a regular fidget.

"Half-past three," she counts, as the big stable clock rings out. "Now I will go on my journey, please, dear."

"All right; don't walk too fast."

After she has gone, I take up a book, and listlessly stroll through the rose-garden down to a rustic arbour. It is a pretty place, thickly covered over with great crimson roses and starry jessamine, and a favourite resort of mine when I crave quietude. Pushing aside the lovely drooping boughs that veil the very entrance, I go in and sit down. I do not attempt to read; nothing seems clear to me lately, save the awful fact that my husband does not—never did love me; worse than that, ay, far, far worse, he loves another woman—my once dearly loved cousin—Andria!

I have been musing thus for a long time, when there is the crush of slowly approaching footsteps on the gravel-path behind the arbour. Suddenly they stop, and a voice says, "No, no, Andria, I must not drive you away; you were to stay three months, and half that time has not elapsed."

"It is right for me to go, Hugh," responds Andria, sadly. "I have broached the subject to May before I started for this walk. You say my presence tempts you almost beyond endurance; does not that fact make it disloyal to May for me to continue? You will forget me sooner when I am gone. Your wife is so fair and

winsome she must, she *will*, draw you to herself when you are alone together."

"Ah, Andria, will that ever be?"

"Sooner or later, I fervently pray."

"Shall I ever forget you, my love? True, too true, your sweet presence maddens me past bearing; sometimes I feel I must take you in my arms and kiss your sweet red lips, my beautiful darling, the only woman I have ever loved . . . ."

Once again my cousin stops him.

Ah, dear Heaven! what have I done that such torture must be mine to endure? torture that makes me writhe in helpless misery as every fresh infliction seems keener than the last—as every chance of hope is torn from me shred by shred. Was ever wife so placed before, that she is doomed to hear her rival check her husband's words of love?

"Hush, Hugh," my cousin goes on, "such expressions are sinful; they only insult me, you know too well," sighing piteously.

"Oh, it is hard, it is hard!" is all my husband answers.

"Before many days I shall be gone; your own words are proof sufficient of this necessity. I will make some excuse about my hurried departure to-morrow; I could not speak of it to May to-night."

"Poor May!" exclaims Hugh, compassionately; "poor, innocent, wronged child! And I thought it was all for her good. I must have been mad: for no good could ever come of such a transaction as that. Andria, I am a wretch, a villain. It was a far greater sin to marry that girl than to leave her to pine for love of me, for a time. The wound would have healed at length, she is so young and light."

"But her love is no light thing, Hugh; and if *she* is spared suffering, is it not better, after all . . . ."

"I tell you it was wrong—entirely wrong. It never would have been done but for that viperish woman who urged me on. Is it nothing that you are to suffer? As for me, I did and do, yes, still do, love you alone, my sweet one."

"Then you are guilty of a fearful sin, Hugh; the past must be buried for ever. You must try to love our little May, who has known nothing but love all her life; it is surely no hard task, so sweet and fair as she is. Oh, Hugh, be kind to her; she was our pet, our darling. Do not let her fancy she is not everything to you—so loving, so fair." She pauses for a moment, then, "She must never, never guess at this, it would be her death-blow," she says. There is silence, broken by my cousin crying sharply, "It would kill her! Hugh,

Hugh, do you hear me? I say it would kill her."

"Yes, I hear you. Do not fear for her, Andria, or—for me. Your sweet self-abnegating words have brought me to my senses, dear. I will put you out of my life for ever. When your visit is over, you will linger in my memory as the holy dead. Like a fair, pure saint you will be to me, my darling; never more, never less than that; and it will not be wrong, for are you not my guardian angel, ever leading me on to the pure and the right?"

"And what of May?" softly breathes my cousin.

"May—shall—be—my—beloved wife."

The thick leaves hide their stricken faces from my view, but the anguished struggle in my husband's voice is awful to hear. It is as if he were entering upon an existence from which love, and hope, and all he held most dear, were for ever banished.

In the same dreary, hopeless monotone that she has never altered throughout, Andria speaks: "You have given me such comfort, Hugh, by promising that. It is the brave and loyal path of duty. Keep in it unwaveringly until it becomes as well the path of love. That will surely be your reward, dear one; I feel it will. Promise me again."

"I promise," solemnly.

"Amen!" she murmurs reverently. "And our darling will be happy."

"You will go to-morrow?"

"Or the next day."

A brief pause—one short, choked sob, in a man's voice. "Kiss me once, Andria, before we part; you will not refuse? After that 'the dead past shall bury its dead' for ever."

Their lips meet in one long, agonised kiss; then my cousin breaks down. Well and nobly has her brave spirit borne its fearful test; well and nobly has she hidden the bitter passion in her surging heart—the ring of pained love in her voice. Upright, strengthening words has she spoken to this tried, erring man who loves her—my husband! But now the string, strung to its highest tension, snaps, and like a flood her great love and sorrow overwhelm her with the might of their unrestrained power.

Gently wave the heavy leaves as the evening breeze comes floating down; and I can see her, as in a dream, fling her white arms around Hugh's neck—see her bury her face in his bosom, her lithe form quivering and panting with the sobs that convulse it—see my husband hold her to him as if he would never let her go. Then the breeze drops, and the parted leaves are joined again. One short moment they

stand thus, ere her voice rings out clear and shrill with the triumph of rightful victory—

"Good-bye, my dead love, good-bye!"

My husband answers not. There is a sound of retreating footsteps—one in one direction, the other in another—and they have parted. Great Heaven! Another such parting must surely tear their very heart-strings asunder.

I sit as I have sat throughout—a numbed, half-dazed sensation creeping over me that chains me to the spot. Even my hands are in the same position they were when Hugh and Andria drew near—loosely clasped behind my head as I recline in the pretty wicker garden-chair that my husband bought one day because I admired it in a shop-window. The fact that I was eavesdropping never struck me; all else save my own bitter wrong and misery fled far from my mind.

So I sit on unmoved, except that my hands fall listlessly into my lap; and so they find me an hour later, when my absence has been observed, in a deadly swoon.

## CHAPTER VI.

**F**OUR years later my husband and I are sitting at dinner at Dhering Chase. It is a wonder we are alone, for we divide the year between here and London, and both houses are generally filled with guests. Sir Hugh and I are considered a most exemplary couple; and if care, kindness, and avoidance of differences make up that desideratum, then we are, for our lives are one unvaried routine of domestic quiet and peace. We have managed to outlive the old trouble; so I am determined never to believe in that often-told myth, "death from a broken heart" again. Such philosophy cannot be true, or surely . . . But I will not digress. Never for one instant has my husband suspected that I knew of his unhappy love for Andria.

I am almost happy, after a fashion, for that I get daily dearer to Hugh is a fact that cannot be hid; though I am perfectly aware that Hugh's love for me is the calm affection founded on esteem, while mine for him is still the same passionate adoration as of old—the one sacred love of a woman's life.

Andria has never married. She still lives with my father, who is growing very infirm. To him, she endeavours with deepest love and devotion to fill up the place of the little daughter he has lost.

Ah, dear old father! dear old home! Would that I had never left the tender shelter of the parent nest!

On the evening in question we are talking of some gentlemen who are coming down for the 1st September. "It won't be very pleasant for me, Hugh, to entertain a party of gentlemen," I complain playfully.

"My dear girl, I am so sorry; I never considered you in the matter."

"Oh, never mind, you will be out nearly all day."

"Yes; that is unless the poachers have not left us any game to shoot. It is more than a week to the 1st—could you not get a lady or two down?"

"I'll see. But are you serious about these poachers being about, Hugh?"

"You heard the gamekeeper complaining of some disturbances. I do not believe in it altogether," declares Hugh.

"He was hurt, was he not?"

"A mere scratch. You see Sims is so suspicious and strict that if he spies a boy astride of a gate near the preserves, he straightway accuses him of being there with the intention of poaching; and they will not always stand it."

"But there are some wild, lawless fellows down in the village just now, Hugh. That horrid Jim Keith is back from Australia, and you know the whole family are bad."

"I admit they are wild characters enough, and the very ones Sims suspects."

"Was it Jim who injured him?"

"Yes; it appears he is pretty sharp upon the Keiths, one and all, and they don't fancy it. However, I still adhere to my opinion as to the poaching affair; there is no proof of it, and there has been so little of the kind on the estate for so long, that—"

"Well, but that does not prevent it now," I interrupt eagerly.

"Anyhow, I mean to see for myself to-night."

A sudden fear leaps up within me. "What do you mean?"

My husband smiles. "Only that I told Sims I would go out with him and his son to-night."

"Oh, Hugh dear!" I cry in dismay; "pray do not venture. You will be killed. Indeed, indeed, I dare not let you go."

"Pooh! little woman, it is seldom a poaching affray ends in anything very tragic nowadays; your formidable ruffian frequently turns out to be an arrant coward. Besides, we have to discover that there *are* poachers first; I am inclined to be incredulous of their existence myself."

"It is dangerous for you to go, Hugh.

Supposing you are not attacked; you might be accidentally shot or—or a hundred things may happen."

I endeavour to dissuade him from his purpose by every means in my power, but in vain. Hugh is very firm, and when his mind is made up, experience has taught me how hard it is to turn him. So I give in with a sinking heart, and when, at half-past eleven, he comes to kiss me before starting, I cling to him with such tearful vehemence that he presses his lips to mine with more true fondness than he ever has before, and there is a ring of tender love in his voice as he says—

"Why, May, dear, loving little wife, it is sweet indeed to be cared for like this; though your fears are so needless, pet." As the grave, grey eyes gaze tenderly into mine, a new, precious hope dawns within me that my husband is beginning to love me at last; and a deep thanksgiving sigh, born of the hope, ascends from my heart on high, as the one great yearning want of my life seems likely to be fulfilled.

I think a reflection of my thoughts must be in my eyes, for Hugh takes my wistful face in his hand, and says, "Are you troubled, dear? Is there any rough place I can smooth away? Tell me; you know how quickly I would do it for you, May, if I could."

"I do know it, my husband," I answer earnestly, with my whole soul in the words. "Nothing would be too hard for you, did you think it would give me pleasure, my kind, good Hugh."

He looks very pleased at my voluntary burst of praise. "And is there nothing, then, that causes those tearful eyes to look so sad?"

"Only your journey to-night."

"Foolish, frightened child! before you have been asleep long enough to dream, I shall be back again beside you." Then he takes me in his arms and kisses me, once—twice—thrice.

As the hall-door closes after Hugh, I go tremblingly upstairs, but not to bed. Dismissing my maid, I sit down before my small escritoire, and proceed to write some letters that are there, half begun. But I do not get far in my task before I catch myself writing mere nonsense; so closing the blotting-book up with an impatient snap, I rise from my seat, and substitute a light muslin dressing-gown for my dinner-dress.

Drawing a chair up to the open window, I loosen my hair till it falls in a thick cloud around me, and gaze out on the sylvan scene below. The August night is clear and breathless; far away, to right and left, extends the richly foliated deer park,

with its pretty patches of mingled glades and noble trees ; straight in front an avenue of giant elms opens down to the still waters of the lake, glistening like a silver sheet in the moonbeams—that same water-lilied lake where Death so nearly claimed us for his own long years ago. I have no enjoyment in the fair picture ; I sit there, restless and uneasy, as the slow hours drag on, a strange sense of oppression preventing me from occupying myself to while the time away.

The stable clock has just struck one, when suddenly a sharp report rings out on the still night air ! another ! another ! Merciful Heaven, the poachers ! Wildly rushing to the door, I fling it open and utter shriek after shriek, which quickly bring the terrified domestics around me in every stage of undress. Hastily I tell them of the danger, though I shiver so from head to foot that the words will scarcely issue from my white lips. Together we troop out, mistress and servants, down the gravelled paths to the park-gates ; never stopping to explain to the sleepy lodgekeeper, almost scared out of his wits as he is at our appearance—on down the dusty road, gleaming ghostly white in the pale moonlight—down towards the dark foreground of sombre firs that mark the commencement of the preserves—down the little slope, through the wicket-gate. There instinctively we stop.

Slowly coming towards us is a small group of men. Distinctly, and more distinctly the measured tread of their footsteps is borne upon the gentle night-wind to our strained ears ; now they are within a few yards, and the moon shines full and clear on the tall form of the burden they are carrying. Most of the servants scream and wring their hands. I do neither ; after that first wild outburst I am like one turned to stone.

I feel no surprise when Sims, recognising me, calls out sharply, "Take her ladyship away ; for the love of Heaven some one take her away ! "

There is a slight movement to obey him, but one glance from me and not a soul dare approach. Stepping forward, I raise the handkerchief they have reverently placed, and gaze upon the dead face of my husband ! Stark and livid, with half-closed, glazing eyes—ah, dear Heaven, dead indeed !

I do not faint, I only look entreatingly into Sims's rugged face, wet with sympathising tears. "He was shot through the heart, my lady ; he died instantly. He had almost caught the villain, when unexpectedly he turned like a tiger at bay and shot Sir Hugh ; my son here was close

behind, and caught him as he fell. Oh ! my lady, my lady, I would rather have died myself than have had to bring you such news as this ! "

The servants join him in his weeping ; and some are uttering loud outcries of vengeance against the ruffian who committed the dastardly deed. They are unanimous in their decision who it is ; only one, they say, could have turned like that upon Sir Hugh.

Waller, my husband's valet, has thrown himself prone at his master's feet ; and with clasped hands and upturned face, is swearing in solemn tones not to rest night or day till the murderer is brought to justice. The tragic scene is getting past human endurance, for the servants are deeply attached to Sir Hugh. Ever kind and considerate to his inferiors, there is not a man, woman, or child on the Dicing estate, and far beyond it too, but will mourn with sincere grief over this night's foul work.

In a dream I order the gamekeeper and his two sons to bear my husband home-wards—in a dream I walk beside them, spurning the offers of assistance that greet me on every side. I see them carry him through the door from which he issued in the prime of life and manhood two short hours ago ; up the wide staircase to his chamber—there they lay him reverently on the bed.

In a hard, grating voice, totally unlike my own, I order every one to leave me alone with Sir Hugh. The old housekeeper begins a few words of respectful remonstrance, but I turn fiercely round, and reiterate my commands in a manner that not one of that pitying, awe-struck group dare question. One by one they softly leave and close the door upon us. With a dreary wail, I throw myself across my husband's still form ; my long hair, loose and floating as I had let it down, falling over us like a golden veil.

"Oh, Hugh, my husband ! have you gone from me ? have you left me alone ? You did not love me as I love you, but your heart was true and loyal ; and oh, my darling, you had forgotten Andria at length, had you not ? My life's devotion was reaping its reward at last ; and now you have left me, my darling ! Ah, if you could only tell me your last thought was of me, your wife—your loving, faithful wife ! " And it seems to my excited imagination that the calm, peaceful face of the dead smiles assent to my words.

My head throbs and whirls ; great balls of lurid light dance before my eyes. The dim light of the lamp seems to flash streaks

of fire all over the room ; but I have no fear for myself as I sit and talk to the husband who will never answer me more. I know they have gone for a doctor—alas ! vain errand—and a vague longing possesses me to say all that I want to say before we are disturbed.

“Hugh, Hugh, my one dear love, how I want to follow you ! I have no one left to live for ; Andria has filled my place with papa, and now you are dead. Did you love me best in all the world before you went, my husband ? I should like to have heard you say that, oh, how much ! but God’s will be done. I shall love you in death as I have loved you in life ; yours alone, my darling, yours alone, till I, too, am called to meet you once again. Oh, happy time ! oh, glad summons ! to meet you once again.”

Not a tear has relieved the burning dryness of my eyes—not a sob the arid blankness of my broken heart. Ever and anon I start up and wildly pace the gloomily-lighted chamber, but always to return to my husband. At length I lie down beside him, my feverish face pressed tightly against his icy-cold cheek ; my hot hands tightly clasping his fast-stiffening ones, till I drop off in a fitful slumber, from which I awake hours after in the first ravings of brain-fever.

\* \* \* \*

It is two years since that awful night. A quiet, calm content in the life I lead as one of the sisters in a London hospital soothes my keener grief, devoted as it is to mitigate the pains and sorrows of suffering humanity. For I have determinedly cast aside my own sorrow, that I may enter more entirely into the afflictions of the mind as well as the physical ailments of the patients under my care.

James Keith was tried for the murder of my husband, and was sentenced to penal servitude for life.

Six months ago Percy Redgrave returned to England, and came to plead once more for my love, now that I was free. But if in the old, happy times, when my heart was untouched, I could not bestow it on him, how, with the cold, awful form of my murdered husband ever present with me, can I now ? It is no longer mine to give or withhold ; dead and buried in the marble vault beneath the chancel in Dhering Church it lies. So, though it grieves me sadly, I send him away.

They tell me that Percy went straight out from my presence, and exchanged into a regiment about to start for the Afghan War, and it is with anxious impatience that I scan the daily papers to see if his name

is among the killed and wounded. I have not long to look before the dreaded information comes—

“KILLED.—Officers.—Captain Stone, Captain Redgrave, Ensign Woodleigh.”

Throwing the paper down, I sink down on to a wooden bench, and cover my face with my hands, sobbing as if I would sob my very life away. Then I pick up the paper and read with blinded eyes the brief account of his brave death. How in the hottest part of the battle his men hung back—for the odds were terribly against them. With a loud shout their captain strove to rally their flagging courage ; but still they hesitated from facing the certain death that lay before them. There was nothing for it but example ; lifting his sword high above his head, he plunged into the thickest of the fight, “and foremost fighting fell.”

One morning I am watching beside the bed of a sleeping patient, when the door opens, and a soft-footed “sister” comes swiftly down the ward towards me. “Here is a letter for you, Sister May,” she whispers, turning to leave directly. It is a foreign letter, directed—

Lady Dhering  
Dhering Chase, or elsewhere,  
Blankshire,  
England.

[To be forwarded.]

The writing is quite strange, and I proceed to open the envelope, somewhat puzzled as to whom it can be from. It contains a little package, on which is written, in characters that cause my heart to leap wildly and my face to blanch to the very lips, these words :—

“I may fall in battle ; if I should die, give these to Lady Dhering. Do not let them be taken from me till I am quite dead.”

With trembling fingers I untie the string that binds it, and there drops out a faded rose ! Only a rose ! the rose I took from my bosom to give him that day we parted long, long ago. Wrapped around its shrivelled stalk is a little note inviting him to dinner. It is signed “MAY DUGALD ;” and it is the only letter I had ever sent to him. Then a bitter cry surges up from my wrung heart—“Percy, Percy ; faithful and true !”

Oh, Wayward Love ! that would not be led, what lives hast thou wrecked in thy waywardness ? Two men who have crossed the dark, mystic river “into the Silent Land ;” two women sad and lonely, left on earth to weep, and watch, and pray, till the glad summons too shall call them hence.

“MIGNON.”

# TEA-TABLE TALK.—BY AMY KEN.

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**T**HE young ladies of Mr. Marston's house were rather surprised to have an early visit from Miss Ken on the morning previous to their next meeting. She wished her nieces to walk with her to the National Gallery, and to view some of the paintings there exhibited, from an artist's point of view. Of course the young ladies were too happy at the chance, Judith remarking, "That's the very thing, because if we are escorted there by any one else, we shall have at least *some* of Aunt Ken's ideas in our heads and be able to join in ordinary remarks."

"Yes," replied that lady, "you have just hit the point this time. Your papa and mamma think that you young ladies, by having some of the chief features in art explained to you, may perhaps retain good food for conversation."

As they neared Trafalgar Square, Annie said, "I have heard Uncle William compare the National Gallery building to pepper-casters, and throw all sorts of ridicule upon it and the fountains in front too, for their insignificance."

"The place was erected when the classic style was in full force, and the grotesquerie of the past was made to do duty on the site which the late Sir Robert Peel considered the finest in Europe. To give credit to the Trustees of the National Gallery, they cared not so much for the external building as that they could make the interior worthy of the British nation, and capable of teaching young artists the peculiar style of past and present great painters. In these essential characteristics it is superior to any gallery in Europe. It is true that several of the Continental galleries possess a greater number of ancient paintings; but none have the pictures so carefully grouped, and not one of them has such examples of modern paintings."

The party now ascended the steps of the gallery, and Miss Ken said she had determined they should grasp one idea at a time, and understand this perfectly before she commenced upon a second. "Now," she continued, "I will take you first to view Turner's works, for I believe that artist to be the most magnificent landscape painter who has ever lived; and as years pass on his wonderful productions will be more and more appreciated. Take a glance at these, 'The Fighting Temeraire,' 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,' and 'The Building of Carthage,' you see in all nobility and

grandeur; and these qualities remain the same whether the subject treated be mountain, ocean, or sunset. Look again at 'Venice'; there are no more figures in this than hundreds of artists have given before; but the water in the Grand Canal seems to sparkle, you see the ripples as the gondolas pass along, and every spar in the boat is clear and distinct. But you find in this gallery side by side with Turner's 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,' is placed 'The Embarkation of St. Ursula,' by Claude, for the purpose of instituting comparison between the two great artists. The subject chosen is a kindred one, and therefore serves the better for the purpose. In Claude you have a pure Italian atmosphere, it is true; there is a brilliant sunlight, rich colour, and the grouping carefully finished; but the whole picture is singularly unreal. Now look at Turner's 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,' there is a soft and pleasant atmosphere, a glowing sunlight, and a quivering sea; the figures appear to walk out of the canvas as if they were alive: everything is true to nature, such as no words can describe, yet the sensitive can perceive. There is something also poetic about it: the plants that cling round the columns or burst the stones asunder to droop in rich luxuriance, tell at once of the crumbling power of time and the eternal growth of nature, ever dying, yet ever young. More than this, however, what a masterly conception of an ideal landscape filled to the last touch with the sentiment and thought of Byron's great work—'an artist translating an artist.'"

"Tell us about 'The Fighting Temeraire,'" said Judith.

"Well, at first sight few things could seem less calculated to make a great picture than a tug-boat at work on the Thames. It is said that Turner being one day on the river, saw the old war-ship being towed up by a small tug, on its way to the breaking-up yard. The subject impressed the artist strongly; and the contrast between the noble lines of the old frigate and the puffing vigour of the small river steamer come out with vivid distinctness in the picture itself. As in all his other pictures, there is the same luminous atmosphere, the same marvellous distance; and, as a critic says, each touch is put on with perfect mastery and perfect knowledge. Prior to Turner's time, Gainsborough was considered the finest example of the English school of

painting ; but as the critic above alluded to says, compare his pictures with Turner's. Take for instance Gainsborough's, 'The Watering Place,' and compare that with Turner's 'The Fighting Temeraire.' Both pictures are clothed in evening light, which in 'The Watering Place' for cattle gives a subdued and tranquil softness to all around. It is the hour of rest, unbroken by hurry or bustle. In the picture of Turner the glow of light is flung across the waters, or leaps from cloud to cloud, until every point on the canvas is more or less distinctly under its influence. You seem to see it creeping in an increasingly subdued manner, making you feel that it is really sundown. I think we will defer further study on this matter until next week ; but I want you all to reflect upon what I have said, and read 'Childe Harold.'

It was later than usual when the party assembled in Miss Ken's room ; and Mr. and Mrs. Marston had arrived before them, self-invited. Mr. Marston made some reference to the new friends his daughters had made in the Isle of Wight.

Judith replied : "Yes, they were capital friends at a distance from home ; but we never hear from them or see them now. If the young gentlemen had not been so very complimentary and polite we should never have undertaken a walk of three or four miles in the hot, broiling sun."

"Their language might have been complimentary to you," said Miss Ken ; "but they held out the most tempting offer to me of seeing the Poet Laureate Tennyson's residence, who has himself described it to the Rev. F. D. Maurice thus :—

- Where, far from noise and smoke of town,  
I watched the twilight falling brown,  
All round a careless ordered garden,  
Close to the ridge of a noble down.
- You'll have no scandal while you dine,  
But honest ale and wholesome wine,  
And *my* hear the magpie gossip,  
Garrulous under a root of pine.
- For groves of pine on either hand,  
To break the blast of winter, stand ;  
And farther on the hoary Channel  
Tumbles a breaker on chalk and sand."

"And did you find these lines verified ?" asked Mr. Marston.

"As far as we could judge by outside appearances ; but the house, and garden too, are so completely shut in by boundary trees and fencing that it is impossible to see everything in the interior. It is, however, a calm, pleasant spot, and the sweet scents of flowers that came floating through the air, the hum of busy bees, and the song of

birds, all seemed to indicate that within that secluded spot there was sweet peace."

"But you don't tell papa and mamma what a splendid luncheon our new friends prepared for us in the village of Freshwater, where they had taken a house," said Judith. "It was only a mile from Freshwater Gate, where we had rooms, and we wanted to linger longer, but aunt would hasten us away."

"Yes," replied Miss Ken. "I do not care about too hastily formed attachments. I don't mean in love-matters alone, but in forming social acquaintances. Some persons pick up with new friends and cast off old ones as they would winter and summer garments. The new associates become all at once like sisters, tell their secrets to one another ; and then a slight word, and all friendship is over—they despise each other quite as much as they previously expressed love and respect. The affection which gradually grows, promoting first confidence in your mind by seeing that your friend is guided in her actions by truth and rectitude is generally enduring, whilst hastily made acquaintances are often injurious to both parties."

"True," said Judith ; "you know how very friendly Miss Moloch was. Well, when we were walking in Hyde Park she rode by ; we bowed, she formally returned it, and quickened her horse's pace. Was not that rude of her ?"

"Perhaps she was only carrying out her parents' wishes. The conventionalities of life are peculiar ; persons who can be most friendly to you in one place will not recognise you in another. A clergyman may be very intimate with you and your family so long as you both remain in the same parish, but will refuse to acknowledge you when one or other of you remove. A bishop may have great personal friendship for an individual, but he would not go and shake his friend by the hand as he came out of a theatre or Dissenting-house. A forcible instance of this occurred when the Prince of Wales proposed to take up his residence at the Vicar of Doncaster's house during the races. The Vicar politely hoped His Royal Highness would defer his visit. Being ever opposed to racing, he did not wish his house made a convenience of on such an occasion, even by royalty. But, perhaps, the best story of the kind is told by Horace Walpole of a person recognising in London an acquaintance he had made in Bath ; and, much to the other's annoyance, he came up to him when in company with some one else. 'Why, my lord,' said he, 'you knew me well in Bath !' 'Possibly in Bath I might know you again,' replied his lordship."

## FAMOUS MEN AND WOMEN.

### THE LATE DUCHESS OF KENT.

ALTHOUGH a rather lengthened period has elapsed since Queen Victoria's mother died, her good deeds live after her; and there are very few persons who have arrived at the age of maturity who have not heard the name of the Duchess of Kent eulogised and her conduct through a comparatively long life admired. The nation grieved when she died in 1861. Her Royal Highness had awakened in the minds of the people a strong feeling of personal regard during an abode of more than forty years in this country. It would be difficult to say how much it is due to her good influence that we are now ruled by a Queen accomplished above most Sovereigns, and by far the most beloved of all who have held the sceptre of these realms. The people of England at the time of the Duchess of Kent's death had learnt to see the mother in the Royal daughter, and for her sake that mother had been endeared to every loyal heart in the British Empire.

Her Royal Highness Maria Louisa Victoria, Duchess of Kent, was the sixth and youngest child of His Serene Highness Francis, Duke of Saxe-Saalfeld-Coburg, and was born on the 17th of August, 1786. At the age of seventeen she married Emich Charles, the reigning Prince of Leiningen, by whom she had a son and a daughter. At the termination of eleven years the Princess of Leiningen found herself in 1814 a widow, to be guardian of her children and Regent of her husband's Principality. Two years afterwards her brother Leopold was married to the Princess Charlotte, only child of George IV., and the heiress-presumptive to the throne of England. How bright were the hopes of the British people on that occasion and how sadly those hopes were disappointed, it is needless here to dwell upon. The Princess Charlotte died in 1817; the Coburg family lost a chance of establishing a dynasty on the throne of these islands; and the British people had the pain of not only losing the Princess of their hearts, but also of anticipating no small difficulty as to the succession. It was under the influence of these anticipations that three Royal Dukes, the Duke of Clarence (afterwards William IV.), the Duke of Kent, and the Duke of Cambridge immediately contracted alliances with German Princesses, and were married within a few weeks of each other. The Duke of Kent selected Prince Leopold's sister, the Princess of Leiningen, and was married to her at Coburg on the 29th of May, 1818, and again at Kew on the 11th of the subsequent July. Mis circumstances—owing to the fact that up to the age of

thirty-two no adequate provision had been made for him, while in his position of a British officer during a period of war he had incurred an unexampled series of losses—were so embarrassed that for the sake of economy he was glad to live on the Continent at his Duchess's palace of Amorbach. He was not there long when the Duchess of Kent entertained the hopes of becoming a mother, and the Duke, remembering one of his Royal father's phrases, hurried with her to England, in order that his child might be "born a Briton."

About a month after their arrival in this country, on the 24th of May, 1819, the Princess Victoria was born at Kensington Palace. Eight months afterwards the Duke of Kent died. It was considered a slight illness he suffered from—only a cold; but it was enough—the Princess Victoria was fatherless, and the Duchess of Kent a widow. The subsequent life of the Queen's mother was summed up very modestly by herself in a statement which she made by way of reply to an address of congratulation presented to her on the occasion of her daughter coming of age; the following sentences will sufficiently convey the mind of the Royal lady. "I pass over the earlier part of my connection with this country," she said. "I will merely briefly observe that my late regretted consort's circumstances and my duties obliged us to reside in Germany; but the Duke of Kent, at much inconvenience and at my personal risk, returned to England that our child should be born and bred a Briton. In a few months afterwards my infant and myself were awfully deprived of father and husband. We stood as strangers—almost friendless and alone in this country; I could not even speak the language. I did not hesitate how to act: I gave up my home, my kindred, my duties (the Regency of Leiningen) to devote myself to that duty which was to be the whole object of my future life. I was supported in the execution of my duties by the country. It placed its trust in me, and the Regency Bill gave its last act of confidence. I have in times of great difficulty avoided all connection with any party in the State; but if I have done so, I have never ceased to press upon my daughter her duties, so as to gain by her conduct the respect and affection of the people. This I have taught her should be her first earthly duty as a Constitutional Sovereign." This statement is simple and true, but much remains behind. The Duke died deeply in debt; and his noble widow gave up all her property to the creditors. She was without furniture or outfit; she had only her jointure of £6,000 a year, and

## Biographies of Famous Men and Women.

### THE LATE DUCHESS OF KENT.

through some defect in the Act of Parliament, she could not touch even this scanty provision for months after the Duke's death. Her chief supporter and adviser amid these trials was her brother, Prince Leopold, who allowed her an additional £3,000 a year out of his income. Nor did he take away this allowance when, in 1825, the Princess Victoria being six years of age, her advisers were enabled to obtain from Parliament a further sum of £6,000 a year to be applied to her education. It was not, indeed, stopped until 1831, when the Prince being made King of the Belgians, felt it to be his duty to forego his allowance of £35,000 a year, which he derived from this country, and then the House of Commons saw the wisdom of giving the Duchess of Kent another £10,000 a year. On each occasion when these motions for an increase of income was made, the name of the Duchess of Kent was received with the fullest expressions of regard. Her boast was not an empty one, that she had always kept aloof from party; the force of it can, however, scarcely be understood in these days of feeble partisanship; but the wisdom with which she had trained her daughter obtained for her a recognition of the highest value. In 1830 it was necessary to determine who should be Regent in the event of King William's decease during the minority of the Princess Victoria. It was decreed in Parliament that in that case the Duchess of Kent—a comparative stranger, who had lived amongst us not more than a dozen years—should be sole Regent. That was a rare compliment. In point of fact, King William died but one month after Princess Victoria had attained her majority. Had this happened a few months earlier the Duchess of Kent would have held the sceptre for a limited period. It hung upon one small turn in the wheel of fortune. As Regent, however, she could only have been formally what she was really—the guide and guardian of the Queen. Although it was known that her influence was all-powerful, she ceased to exert it in 1837, when the Ministers of the Crown became Her Majesty's advisers; and still more in 1840, when she saw her daughter given away in marriage to her nephew, Prince Albert. Then her task was finished. She had done her duty, and henceforward she had but to live and reap the reward. That reward she found in the respect of the people, in the affection of a devoted family, and in the triumph of her most ardent wishes for their success.

Her Royal Highness's later years were, unfortunately, a period of much suffering from cancer; and at the marriage of the Princess Royal her grandmother was observed to be much distressed and in very

delicate health. She had suffered severely from the death of her son, the Prince of Leiningen, a year or two before; and her life had been, on the whole, one of great anxiety, so as to render it rather a matter of wonder she should attain her advanced age—seventy-four. Although she principally lived at Frogmore, within Windsor Park, Her Royal Highness accomplished with little flagging, almost to the last, the periodical removals to Scotland, the Isle of Wight, and London, which were as regularly established for her as for the Court; and bodily affliction apart, her old age was a happy one, many of the hours being passed in her Royal daughter's presence, and many more cheered by the affectionate attentions of her grandchildren. Wherever she appeared, whether in London or the provinces, she was invariably received with the respect and affection which were due alike to the virtues of her character and the success of those efforts to fit her daughter for her high position, which have resulted in England having the most popular crowned head in Europe, or in the world. Of the children of the Duchess of Kent by her first marriage with the Prince of Leiningen, only one survived at her death. Charles Frederick married, in 1829, Maria, daughter of the late Count Maximilian of Kleblesberg, but died in 1857. His son, the Prince of Leiningen, became an officer in the British Navy. The Princess Anne Feodore for some time resided with her mother in England, but in 1822 was united to Ernest Christian Charles, Prince of Hohenlohe-Langenburg. The remains of the Duchess were deposited in the Royal Vault at Windsor on the 25th of March, 1861, the funeral being attended by the Prince Consort, the Prince of Wales, and other members of the Royal Family; but they were afterwards removed to the Royal Mausoleum at Frogmore.

The death of her Royal mother was the first severe affliction the Queen had ever experienced. At first she was inconsolable, and wept bitter tears; yet she had then one to comfort her, one to advise with her, and one in whom she could place all the confidence, and more, than she could repose in a mother. This, of course, was Prince Albert, or rather the Prince Consort. He was in full health and vigour on the death of the Duchess of Kent, and used all his efforts to reconcile the Queen to the loss she had sustained. Alas! Her Majesty little thought that nine months afterwards she would lose her husband also. Strong in her attachments, even after death, the Queen still lingers over the remains of her mother, as she does over those of Prince Albert.

# SUMMER SUPPLEMENT.

## A SUMMER MADNESS

BY THE AUTHOR OF "MAX CRAVEN'S LOVE," "HILARY," "A DOUBTING LOVE." ETC.

"And to be wroth with one we love,  
Doth work like madness in the brain."

### CHAPTER I.



pretty, pathetic face betrays her. With one stride he is at her side, and her hands are in his grasp.

"Pshaw ! you love me !" he cries triumphantly.

Molly Dayrell laughs, and the pretty pink hue always abloom on her cheek deepens to carmine, and her red lips glow so vividly that he cannot refrain from saluting both cheeks and lips.

"So you do not like me—you love me?" he whispers ; and Molly ans-

"Yes."

The old Manor garden, with its winding walks, its retreats, its *allees*, is very picturesque. The sunbeams flicker on the sable yews and silvery birches ; the wind rustles among the grasses and flowers ; the birds twitter in their leafy parades. Molly thinks, as she and Rex walk slowly between the sweet-smelling flower-beds, that never before was so perfect a day created. She says, and her voice is so blithe it is happiness to hear it—

"There is no time like summer-time, Rex."

"No"—his negative is uttered dreamily. Molly looks at him wonderingly. He sees the look and answers it. "Summer and winter will be alike beautiful to me, now I know you love me," he declares. "Molly, I was almost afraid to tell you that I loved

**S**HE stands in the sunshine ; he stands in the shadow. She is smiling, a demurely provoking smile ; he is frowning sombrely. She is Molly Dayrell ; he is Rex Amyot.

"You are not in earnest?" he says.

She flings up her hands at the accusation, and looks at him with a charming assumption of candour. "Indeed, I am in earnest. I do not like you, Rex."

"Molly !" His chagrin is very evident. She does not dare glance at him lest he shall see the mirth in her eyes and understand it. She picks a handful of mignonette and scatters it. How foolish Rex is ! She enjoys tormenting him immensely. He turns on his heel. Will he leave her ? He puts half a dozen yards between himself and her, and then suddenly he turns. Ah, she is off guard ! The wistful expression upon her

"I feared you would tell me you could never love me."

"Rex!"

They pause by the sun-dial. Never mind what they say to one another. They are young, and youth is prodigal of words and of caresses. Rex studies Molly's winsome face *con amore*. Connoisseurs of beauty will not allow that she is beautiful; but most certainly she is goodly to look at. Her cheeks are daintily and cunningly painted; her shining blue eyes are lustrous; her laughing lips are fragrant and bewitching. Rex thinks no maiden fairer than she ever delighted the heart of man; he deems her lovely. Something of this he tells her; and though she bids him not flatter her, his flattery does not displease her. She is not as pretty as Rex would have her believe, of course; but she hopes his assertion that she is bonny is not absolutely untrue.

The minutes pass as such blissful minutes always do pass—swiftly. Molly is the first to remember that the morning is waning. "I must go, Rex," she says. "Beevor may want to consult with me. It is a busy day with us, you know. Mrs. Dayrell comes home to-night."

Rex nods, but he does not release the cool fingers lying so confidingly in his. "How do you like the thought of another mistress at Dayrell?" he asks.

A grave expression flits over Molly's radiant face. She is silent a moment ere she replies: "Rex, I hope that Mrs. Dayrell and I will be friends. I think she hopes so too. The letter she sent me when my father died was the letter of a good woman, and her other letters have been very kind."

Rex Amyot shakes his head involuntarily. He is not inclined to think well of Mrs. Dayrell. She must be a scheming, worldly-wise creature, or she would not have married a man so many years her senior as Ambrose Dayrell.

Molly Dayrell is motherless and fatherless. Her mother died at her birth; her father died two years ago. The late Squire Dayrell was twice married; his first marriage was a marriage of policy, his second marriage was one of affection. He had not loved Molly's mother, but the wife who is now his widow he had loved passionately. Ambrose Dayrell's second marriage was a surprise to every one. Molly received no warning that her father was about to present her with a stepmother until the marriage was an accomplished fact; then the papers blazoned the news far and wide that Ambrose Dayrell had wedded Ruth Lister, daughter of John Lister, gentleman.

Very brief was Squire Dayrell's wedded life. Only nine months had Ruth Lister been Ruth Dayrell, when he died. They had lived abroad, so that Molly had never seen her stepmother. Her father's death was very sudden and very unexpected. A cold, an attack of fever, and he was dead. Molly grieved sincerely for him. She had known little of her father, but he was her father. Mrs. Dayrell did not return at once to Dayrell. The shock of her husband's death had brought on a nervous illness, and her physicians refused, <sup>to</sup> consent to her coming to England. She must travel, they said. She did not ask Molly to come to her; and this, considering that Ambrose Dayrell had appointed her Molly's personal guardian, was a little curious. She corresponded regularly with Molly, and Molly grew to look for her letters.

Months elapsed, and at last Mrs. Dayrell sent word that she was coming to Dayrell. Three weeks' warning she gave of her advent. The three weeks are gone now. Molly tells Rex she is to meet Mrs. Dayrell this evening at five o'clock, and that consequently he must not hinder her as he is doing.

Ruefully he prepares to depart. Molly smiles at his mournful visage. "You can see me to-morrow," she says. "Come over, and I will introduce you to Mrs. Dayrell."

"To-morrow!" Rex echoes lugubriously. "To-morrow!—that's an age away. It is to-day I want you." Recklessly indifferent is he to the inquisitive eyes of the sparrow swaying upon a branch of a lime-tree, for boldly he flings his arms around her, and kisses her. "Good-bye, my darling!" he cries. "Stay! give me something to keep until I see you again."

Molly opens her eyes widely. "What can I give you?" she queries.

A little closer he draws her to himself, tilts her chin insinuatingly near his own, and murmurs, "A kiss."

"No, no, Rex!"

"Yes, Molly."

She hesitates. He is very tiresome. Heigho! it is more trouble to refuse his request than to comply with it. Shyly her tender lips brush his mouth, then she flies from him.

Dayrell Manor is not an old house. It has been built about a hundred years. The old Manor was burnt to the ground and this house built in its stead. It is a very comfortable house. Its rooms are lofty and large; its staircases and corridors are wide. From its front windows you get a magnificent view of the country; the view at the back of the house is ob-

## A SUMMER MADNESS.

structed by Dayrell Wood. The owners of Dayrell would not, however, have this otherwise, for they esteem Dayrell Wood one of their most choice possessions ; they boast of its beauty, of its extent, of its venerable trees, of its wildness ; and they do not boast alone. Dayrell Wood is regarded by the whole country-side as one of Nature's *chef d'oeuvres*.

Molly runs up the steps and enters the hall. Mrs. Beevor, the housekeeper, meeting her, carries her off to see Mrs. Dayrell's rooms; for to them, in Molly's absence, certain final and embellishing touches have been added. Molly pronounces the general effect all that can be desired. Mrs. Beevor listens to her encomiums with a deprecating air.

"Yes," she says, and she sighs profoundly ; "it is all very nice. I do not think there is any fault to be found ; but, Miss Molly, I cannot but wish Mrs. Dayrell were not coming to Dayrell."

"Beevor!" rebukingly.

Beevor is privileged. She repeats resolutely, "I do wish she were not coming. She puts you out of your place ; it is you who should rule over us, not a stranger."

"Hush ! My father chose her for his wife ; we must give her the honour that is his due, until we can give her the honour that is her own. I fancy," cheerily, "we sha' l be speedily enchanted with her. I fancy she is very likable."

"Miss Dayrell ?" interrogatively.

The express from London has just dashed into the primitive little Dayrell station. Molly, standing on the platform looking about her eagerly, starts, and gazes at her interlocutor. She sees a slim girlish figure, a pale oval face, two starry eyes. She answers promptly—

"I am Miss Dayrell ; you are?"

"Mrs. Dayrell."

Molly extends her hand silently, her speech fails her. This Mrs. Dayrell ! this her stepmother ! She looks at her in amaze, then recovers her self-possession. "The carriage is waiting ; will you come with me ?"

Mrs. Dayrell bows and follows her ; the carriage and servants are in the lane. Molly takes a seat opposite Mrs. Dayrell. As the carriage starts she cries hurriedly—

"I bade Thomas see to your luggage, but I forgot your maid."

"I did not bring one. Mine did not suit me, and I parted with her in London."

Molly is startled. "You travelled alone ?" she exclaims.

"Yes." Mrs. Dayrell smiles. "I was

not inconvenienced. I am well able to depend upon myself. You will find me a maid, Molly."

Molly is glad to hear her name thus simply spoken. "I can find you one maid, or two maids if you wish," she cries ; "that is if Dayrell maids will please you."

The horses are fresh, so they make short work of the journey. Mrs. Dayrell glances from the window as they hasten by fields, hedges, farmsteads, and barns. The face of the earth is peaceful, and the sky is flooded with a blue-violet light. Molly watching Mrs. Dayrell sees her eyes suddenly fill with tears. "It is very pretty !" she says, and there is certainly the sound of a sob in her voice. Molly, impetuous Molly, rests her hands upon the tightly clasped ones.

"It is your home," she whispers. "I hope you will be very happy here."

Her tone, so full of kindness, soothes Ruth Dayrell's chafed spirit. "Molly," she cries, "you are very good, and your father left you to me ; will you let me love you ?"

"Yes."

A pause. A few more minutes, and the carriage passes through the gates of Dayrell, and Molly announces, "We are at Dayrell. Welcome home!"

Mrs. Dayrell declares that she is not tired. She comes down to dinner, and Molly and she grow friendly over the meal. While the servants are in the room Molly chatters of unimportant trifles ; but when, dinner over, they adjourn to the drawing-room, their conversation waxes confidential. The candles are unlighted, and twilight is wrapping everything in dusky habiliments. Molly puts Mrs. Dayrell into a lounging-chair, and herself into a low seat by the window. She is anxious to hear something about her father. Questions are trembling upon her tongue. Mrs. Dayrell guesses what she is craving to ask, and broaches the subject. She tells Molly, in few graphic sentences, all that is to be told of Mr. Dayrell's last illness. When her soft voice ceases, Molly says sorrowfully—

"I wish I could have seen him before he died."

"I wish so too, but we did not anticipate danger until it was too late to send for you. It was so sudden. He appeared likely to live many years." She stops. Molly feels her trembling.

"He loved you !" she cries.

"Yes," faintly, "Molly, I was afraid you would hate me."

Molly is astonished. Mrs. Dayrell says boldly—she is determined this talk shall

not be mere surface talk—"Your father's will must have surprised you very much, Molly."

Molly reddens. Mrs. Dayrell sees the rosy blush.

"Ah, I feared so. You think the Squire should have left Dayrell to you. Molly, I never dreamed that he intended to leave it to me. It ought to be yours. If I could give it to you——"

Molly interrupts. "Dayrell was my father's own property, he was right to do what he liked with it. Just at first I was a little pained that he had not given it to me, but now I do not mind. I have my mother's money, and my father bequeathed me a handsome fortune. If I have any cause to grumble it is that I am too rich. Believe me, I do not grudge you the Manor."

Ruth Dayrell looks steadfastly at the bonny face turned to her. "I do not think you do," she says.

A moth flies into the room. Mrs. Dayrell studies the shadows. Molly muses, and cries abruptly, "You are my guardian. I cannot marry without your consent."

In spite of herself, Mrs. Dayrell laughs. "Molly, surely your thoughts do not run on marriage already."

Molly jumps up and leans over Mrs. Dayrell's chair. "Kuth—I shall call you Ruth, I cannot say Mrs. Dayrell, and any other title would be absurd—I am eighteen. My mother was only eighteen when I was born."

Ruth Dayrell holds Molly before her. Her words are significant. Keenly she gazes at the crimson, childish face, and she reads a story in its mobile lines. So her guardianship of Molly is not to be a merely nominal task! Very gently she says, "Does somebody want to marry you, Molly?"

The dimples on either side of Molly's mouth quiver. "Rex Amyot does," she murmurs.

Ruth is relieved. She knows Rex Amyot by report. Her husband had spoken of him to her; he thought highly of him. Doubtless he would have accepted him as a suitor for his daughter. Molly's lips are against her ear, her blue eyes are gleaming.

"Promise me," coaxingly, "you will not say 'no' to him when he asks you to say 'yes.'"

"If he convinces me that he loves you I will not say 'no.'"

"Thank you." Molly is more than satisfied.

## CHAPTER II.

 ED roses! Molly Dayrell buries her face in a bunch of red roses with an exclamation of delight. Ruth Dayrell smiles indulgently as she listens to Molly's lavish praises; the roses are beautiful.

"Another glorious day!" Molly cries, when she has exhausted all the adjectives in her vocabulary. "Ruth, put on your bonnet and come out."

Ruth is not loth. The weather is really too delicious to be ignored; the sunshine tempts the most inveterate stay-at-home out. She runs upstairs and comes down equipped for walking. Where is Molly? She has vanished. Ah! Ruth hears a merry, rippling voice. She steps to the window. On the lawn Molly stands chatting with Rex Amyot and a gentleman unknown to Mrs. Dayrell. She is a little discomposed. Rex and she are good friends, and his friendship contents her. She does not wish to form a large circle of acquaintances.

Molly catches sight of her, and comes towards her. "Ruth, will you let me introduce Rex's most familiar friend to you, Mr. Keith Brabazon?"

Ruth murmurs an affirmative. Mr. Brabazon looks with undisguised interest at Mrs. Dayrell, and something in her slim, black-draped figure pleases him. Ruth, surveying him hastily, sees that he is a tall, big-framed, ugly-faced man, and—but Molly's voice is uplifted.

"Rex, we were going for a ramble."

"Why were, Molly?"

Molly laughs and corrects, "We are going for a ramble."

"You will not object to our going too?"

"I suppose not—eh, Ruth?"

Ruth is amused. "If you have nothing better to do, Mr. Amyot, and care to come with us."

Rex is gallant. He vows that it is impossible he can have anything better to do.

A soft westerly wind is blowing; the sun is shining in all its strength; the hay-makers are busy in the fields. Molly and Rex leave Ruth to the companionship of Mr. Brabazon. Ruth wishes that they had remained with them. Mr. Brabazon will find her company dull, she fears.

Does he? Keith Brabazon is a well-cultured man of the world. Very speedily he sets Ruth at ease. They talk of the country, of Dayrell, of books, of pictures, of very ordinary matters. Ruth is surprised to discover by-and-by that the talk which so tickles her ears is about—nothing.

They have not discussed anything of moment, and yet how completely her attention has been engrossed!

Ruth Dayrell has been a month at Dayrell. Dayrell is home to her now. She and Molly agree capitally. Ruth manages her servants wisely; she shows them that she wishes Molly to be in every respect as much considered as she was formerly. She studies to find favour in their sight, and she succeeds.

An hour's ramble and they retrace their steps, all walking together towards Dayrell. Molly's many syllables hide Ruth's silences. Mr. Brabazon glances at Ruth furtively. He is anxious to decide whether she is beautiful or not. It is a difficult task. One minute he tells himself that she is too colourless, the next he debates whether her want of colour is not in itself a charm. She is of average height, slender, but not thin. Her eyes—they are limpid, sad brown eyes—are without question exquisite; and if her mouth is a trifle too large, her well-moulded, dainty chin amply atones for this. Her face is the face of a true-hearted woman; she does not look like one who would marry an old man for his wealth; and yet—Keith Brabazon assures himself that a fair countenance is by no means a proof of a fair soul.

Molly is a little disappointed that Ruth does not invite Rex and Mr. Brabazon to luncheon; but she consoles herself quickly. Rex has promised to come over in the evening and try a new song with her.

The two men, after parting with the ladies, saunter slowly. Rex hums a bar or two blithely, and Mr. Brabazon cogitates. Suddenly he demands—

"Who is Mrs. Dayrell?"

Rex comes down from the clouds, and the pretty airy structure he has erected with infinite pains is demolished. He looks at Keith. "She is Mrs. Dayrell. She was a Miss Lister. Squire Dayrell met her abroad and married her."

"Has she a father or mother living?"

"No; Molly tells me she has no near relatives. She is rather reticent concerning her affairs."

"Was she poor before her marriage?"

"I presume she was. If she had not lacked gold and silver, would she have married the Squire? It is preposterous to imagine that sentiment had aught to do with her marriage. He was nearly forty years older than she."

"Ah!" Keith Brabazon does not care to hear anything of Squire Dayrell. He is thinking of the flower-face from which awhile ago he banished the shadow. In fancy he sees the delicate oval cheeks just

touched with a *soufflé* of colour. He marvels how the ivory flesh would look pink-tinted, how the big brown eyes would gleam were she glad. He feels intuitively that she has a sorrowful history, and unconsciously he longs to share the burden of it. He brushes his vague fancies aside. Has he lost his senses? He shakes himself, and mutters an uncomplimentary word. What is Ruth Dayrell to him that she haunts him thus?

Rex takes out his pipe, and asks, as he fills it, "How do you like Molly?"

"Very much; she is a nice little girl. But you will not be marrying immediately, Rex?"

"No, worse luck!" Rex says dolorously. "Mrs. Dayrell will not hear of anything less than a two-years' engagement. Molly is so young, she contends, she may not know her own mind."

"She is a sensible woman."

Rex grimaces. "That is your opinion now, *mon ami*. When you are bidden to wait for the maid you want for your wife you will alter it."

Keith Brabazon laughs. "I shall never marry," he says. "No woman would fall in love with my ugly face."

Rex puffs away vigorously, and between the puffs asserts that, "Women are less influenced by good looks than we are."

Keith Brabazon is an ugly man. His brow is square and hard; his keen grey eyes are overhung by bushy eyebrows; his mouth is wide, his jaw is massive. He justly declares that all his features are irregular and awry; and yet, in spite of all its demerits, his face is attractive. It is full of genial thought, of

"Odd curves and unexpected points of light,  
Pleasant surprises, quaintly broken lines."

Not very far are they from Amyot Chase, when Keith Brabazon cries abruptly, "Rex, if you will offer me the invitation which I refused last night again, I will accept it."

"You mean that you will stay with us some weeks?"

"Yes."

Ruth Dayrell looks from the library windows with unseeing eyes. She is dreaming, idly dreaming a tangled dream in which pleasure and pain are inextricably interwoven. The sunshine, perceiving her, is seized with inspiration; a touch here and a touch there, and a pretty picture is glorified. Her dream evaporates. Some one is coming up the avenue. A red spot glows in her cheeks: that well-knit, erect figure is familiar to her. Keith Brabazon sees her, and instead of going round to the

dor, he advances and halts before the French window.

"Mrs. Dayrell smiles. "Good morning. Will you come in?"

He steps in and glances round; she is alone.

"Rex and Molly have gone for a gallop," she says.

"And left you at home?"

"They wished me to go with them, but I refused. I am lazy to-day. I told them I preferred to read this new poem."

He takes the book she holds from her, and runs his eyes over the poem she indicates.

"Do you like it?" he asks.

"I have not read it."

"Let me read it to you."

"No, no; I cannot trouble you."

"Trouble me!" he laughs. "Mrs. Dayrell, may I make a proposal?"

"Yes," wonderingly.

"Put on a shady hat, and sit under the trees, and lend me your ears while I acquaint myself with the Poet Laureate's last effort."

Her eyes meet his. His voice is persuasive, and the house is unbearably hot. She consents.

Keith Brabazon reads well. Ruth pretends to occupy her fingers with a strip of embroidery, but the pretence is very transparent; for the most part the work lies on her lap unheeded. The bees boom and buzz; the flowers rustle as the golden beams flit among them; the trees raise their branches heavenward; the sky is deeply, intensely blue. Ruth shuts her eyes. Is it all real? Is it she, Ruth Dayrell, who is enjoying this summer morning? Surely some spell is upon her; surely in some subtle glamour all her senses are steeped! She must rouse herself, she must throw off this enervating delight. Ah, she will be happy for the nonce! Keith Brabazon closes the volume.

"Dayrell life suits you, Mrs. Dayrell."

"Yes; it is so pleasant, so tranquil. One can forget all care here."

"You have cast care?" There is no curiosity in his tone, only a touch of sympathetic interest.

Ruth answers unhesitatingly, "Ay; there are dark days in every life; there have been dark days in mine. Are there more in store for me, I wonder?"

He is silent. She goes on, as though communing with herself, "It is best, it is said, to bear the yoke in one's youth. Is that because when we are young we can bear a heavier yoke than when we are old—bear and not break beneath its weight?"

Keith gazes at her. What was her yoke? A galling yoke, he is convinced, for the

memory of it brings dense gloom to her brow.

She catches a glimpse of the concern in his eyes, and her own fall. "Forgive me for inflicting this egotistical moan upon you, Mr. Brabazon," she entreats. "I am ashamed of myself."

She rises; he rises too. "Don't say that, Mrs. Dayrell, or I shall think you regard me as a very indifferent acquaintance."

"Nay," the words escape her without thought, "you need not think that. I esteem you as a friend."

Keith Brabazon's face flushes. She esteems him as a friend! He puts out his hand eagerly, and she, moved out of her ordinary calm, puts hers into it. Very softly he says, "You honour me!"

Mrs. Amyot is a little woman with a sallow face and a sharp nose. She is a kindly soul, irresolute and weak of will. Her children, her son Rex and her daughter Olive, rule her—Rex always tenderly, Olive sometimes tyrannously. Olive Amyot is a handsome demoiselle of two-and-twenty. She, naturally a quick-tempered, jealous-natured girl, has been spoiled by her indulgent mother and brother. Keith Brabazon is the only being who has ever thwarted her whims and refused to obey her caprices. He has great influence over her; for him she will do what she would not for any other mortal: his pleasure is very dear to her.

The dressing-bell rang some time since at Amyot Chase. Olive is in the drawing-room, impatiently enduring her own society, impatiently waiting for the coming of Rex or Keith. Her brows are frowning; her magnificent dark eyes have lurid sparks in them. Keith has been absent all day, and his absence vexes her. The door opens; she smooths her face. It is Keith.

"Alone, Olive?" he says carelessly; and Olive is angry that her pulses beat violently at the sound of his voice.

"Is Rex with you?" she asks.

"No; he bade me tell Mrs. Amyot that he should not dine at home to-night. Miss Dayrell is spending the evening at the Rectory, consequently he also is spending it there."

Olive nods; Keith rests his arm on the mantel-board and looks down upon her. What a superb creature she is! Her luscious, velvety eyes have a dangerous dazzle in their depths; her pomegranate mouth is witching and alluring. She is dressed in a filmy dress, the hue of which is not distinguishable in the twilight: but

Keith notices that it clings to her sinuous, graceful figure.

"Where have you been wandering?" she queries gaily. "You went out before noon, and it is now nearly seven o'clock. Give an account of yourself, sir."

"I called at the Manor this morning," he says, "and this afternoon I went as far as Crewe."

"Oh, you called at the Manor! Keith, how do you like the young widow?"

Something in the inquiry grates on Keith Brabazon's ear. He responds curtly, "I like Mrs. Dayrell."

Olive glances at him sharply. She is too used to him not to notice every inflection in his tones, every expression of his features. What is Mrs. Dayrell to him? A sudden fear smites her—a foolish fear, she assures herself. Her love for Keith Brabazon must be crazing her if she thinks of every woman at whom he looks as a possible rival. Mrs. Amyot comes in, the butler announces dinner, and Olive quells the tempest in her breast.

After dinner Keith and she go out for their customary after-dinner walk. It is so warm, Olive will not put on her hat and jacket; she throws a thin shawl over her head and shoulders. Their walk is a restricted one, it never extends beyond the gardens. To-night Keith is unwontedly taciturn. Olive has to bear the weight of the talk; fortunately she is very capable of bearing it. Her conversational powers are brilliant. Nature has endowed her with a remarkably vigorous brain and a remarkably witty tongue. She beguiles Keith with her cynical, shrewd observations; nevertheless he thinks well to reprove her harsh judgments of her neighbours.

"You condemn very quickly, Olive," he says. "You seem to think there is but a small quantity of goodness in the world, and little or no unselfishness."

"There is not," she retorts; "everybody is tainted with selfishness—some are absolutely diseased with it. Self is the god we worship nowadays."

"No, no."

"Yes. Of course it exhibits itself in different guises, and sometimes it is so skilfully garbed that we mistake it for unselfishness. It is only when it is naked we cry out in terror at the sight of it, only when its vile breath is unscented we shrink from it. Clothe it in dainty raiment, pour perfume upon it, and we extol it. Take, for instance, a case at hand. We all aver that the selfish thought which prompts a young woman to mate with Mammon is despicable; and yet when a girl marries a

man old enough to be her grandfather, and is speedily left a wealthy widow, do we close our doors against her? No, we welcome her to our homes with acclamation."

"Olive, what are you saying?" Mr. Brabazon interrupts. "You have no right to impute mercenary motives to Mrs. Dayrell." His face is afire with indignation.

Olive's lips grow white; she has much ado to preserve her composure. "I do not wish to asperse Mrs. Dayrell," she says, "but if she did not marry old Ambrose Dayrell for his money, for what did she marry him?"

Ay, for what? Keith is dumb. Olive shivers, the wind chills her, mild though it is. "Let us go indoors," she cries; and without a remonstrance Keith acquiesces.

### CHAPTER III.

 **EVERYBODY** who is anybody about Dayrell offers the hand of fellowship to Ruth Dayrell, but she refuses to grip it. She has no desire to emerge from seclusion yet. True, it is two years since her husband died, but she has no inclination for gaiety. For Molly's sake she accepts a few invitations, and gives a couple of dinner-parties; but when Mrs. Amyot hints that she is willing to chaperon Molly, Ruth very gladly accepts her offer. It is right that Molly shall share in the summer festivities, but for herself retirement is best.

Vainly does Molly try to shake her resolution: she has determined to spend one more summer quietly. She joins in all the homely pleasure Molly and Rex devise; she is always ready to make one in walks, and drives, and rides; she is not averse to musical evenings, to half-hours upon the water; she is sociable and cheerful; but balls, dances, and garden-parties she obstinately abjures.

Molly and Rex are gathering strawberries. Ruth has just concluded an interview with Mrs. Bevor. She, for want of something better to do, trifles with a dish of flowers, and without a thought sings in a low key a quaint old melody. Her own voice startles her. What is coming to her? How happy she is! Ah, why is she so happy? Day after day the sun blazes in rare glory; day after day the world rejoices; day after day she lives and is glad. She will not analyse this gladness; she will enjoy it, and thank Heaven for it. Perhaps it will wing itself away when the rain-clouds blot out the sunshine; if it does, she will dwell upon the memory of it.

Very tenderly she touches the flowers. Pretty things! it was a shame to pluck them. Why not have left them to bloom in the fragrant air under the golden sky? She lifts a white rose to her lips.

"Mrs. Dayrell!" It is Keith Brabazon. She is surprised. She thought he was miles away; she thought he was in London. He laughs.

"Are you sorry to see me?" he asked. "If you are I will go away, but I really could not stay in London—the heat and the dust there were awful."

She flushes; she murmurs a word or two, and they are not words of dismissal. He looks at her with unconcealed delight. He fancies her beauty is more beautiful than when he last beheld it. Heigho! Keith Brabazon is apt to fancy this every time he sees Ruth Dayrell. He has just parted with Molly and Rex, he announces, when their fitful chit-chat ceases, and Molly has commanded him to bring Mrs. Dayrell to them.

The strawberry-beds are not many minutes' walk from the house; but it takes Ruth and Keith very many minutes to get to them. When at last they reach the place, Molly and Rex are nowhere to be seen. Silence is reigning, the strawberry-pickers are gone. Keith suggests that they shall try and find them, and Ruth agrees. Their search is not energetic. They saunter as slowly as is possible, and the summer saunters with them, and the breezes, liltting harmonies, touch first the man's lips and then the woman's. Oh, very pleasant is the earth's holiday-making! A great longing possesses Keith: if Time would only pause awhile, if Life would only tarry this June day! They do not say much to one another, and what they say is said rather for—

"The delight of low replies"  
than for aught else."

A mighty joy leaps within Keith Brabazon's heart, a joy he has never experienced before. He loves Ruth Dayrell—he, who has never until now loved woman. His life has been a solitary one. He has known nothing of home loves, or other loves; indeed, in the true meaning of the word he has been homeless always. Since his college days he has pitched his tent here and there, according to his humour. He has no kin to take interest in his goings and comings. Rex Amyot, his college-chum, is the only man he calls friend. Amyot Chase is the only house under whose roof he cares to dwell. Fastidious and reserved is he, consequently he is reputed proud and cold.

Molly and Rex are not to be found. Keith racks his brains for some excuse which will serve to detain Ruth in the odorous air, but he racks them to no purpose. Ruth and he return to the house. She leaves him in the cedar-room, and disappears to take off her walking-dress. Has vanity at last ensnared Ruth? She throws aside her hat and cloak, and stands before her glass deliberately scanning her features. She does not think the face she sees a very comely one. The cheeks are too pale, the eyes too pensive. Suddenly, as she looks, it seems to her another face looks over her shoulder and reflects itself in the glass—a face bearing a resemblance to her own? ay, but flecked with warm colour, tinted with carmine hues. Ruth's eyes are humid, her mouth quivers piteously, a sob bursts from her—"My darling!" she wails, "my darling!"

\* \* \* \*

Molly, with puss beside her, lies upon the broad window-seat in the low dining-room at Amyot Chase. Olive lounges on a couch, and fans herself at intervals. It is a sultry afternoon, the wind is soundly asleep; the flowers hang their heads and yearn, as only parched, sunburned flowers can yearn, for evening. Not a bird chirps; not a leaf moves; everything is still, drowsy, somnolent. Olive disturbs the charmed quiet.

"Molly," she remarks, "Keith has been a good deal at the Manor lately."

"Has he?" yawning terrifically. "Olive, you silly, did you not see I was dozing? You have wakened me."

Olive laughs. "Night is the time for rest," she quotes. "Are you so tired, childie, that you must needs slumber while it is day?"

"No"—Molly raises her head—"I am not tired; but the afternoon is so long, and I thought a nap would shorten it."

"You are lazy. Sit up and talk."

Molly obeys the first portion of the command. She sits up, and pushes the featherycurls from her forehead, and gapes again.

"Do you like Keith, Molly?" Olive's voice is abrupt. Molly looks at her slyly.

"Yes," nonchalantly. "Olive," a twinkle in her eye, "do you like him?"

Olive's serenity is unshaken; her fan continues to wave to and fro steadily. "I like him, and he likes me," she says calmly. "We have been friends for many years."

"Ay." Molly ruffles the cat's coat mischievously. Olive's next question does not appear particularly *a propos*.

"If Mrs. Dayrell marries again, does she lose Dayrell?"

"No ; it is hers unconditionally. But she is not likely to marry again."

"You cannot be certain of that. I think she is very likely to do so. She is moderately rich and young."

"And beautiful."

Olive bites her lip. "She is not beautiful."

"Yes," decidedly, "she is. Olive," curiously, "why do you dislike her?"

"I have never said I dislike her."

"You do dislike her."

Olive is silent. Molly is right. She does dislike Mrs. Dayrell—dislikes her with a very fierce and unjust dislike. Not refuting the charge, she says, "We know so little of her, and she is very chary of speaking of herself. Molly, I am sure she is not reticent without reason. I have watched her closely. I am persuaded she is concealing something from you—from us."

Molly stares. If Olive is not joking she must be demented. Ruth have something to conceal? No. She smiles derisively. "You have a bee in your bonnet, Olive," she cries; "you misjudge Ruth sadly if you think there is anything secretive about her."

"Do I? That is your opinion, Molly. Time will show whether your faith is well founded or not." She springs from the couch. She has uttered her warning; she has dropped a seed that may bear fruit into Molly's mind. It is with some relief, for she does not wish to pursue the subject now, that she hears her brother's step. "Here is Rex," she says. "Not a word about Mrs. Dayrell before him, Molly."

Sunset. Rex fidgets as he waits for Molly. How lengthy her adieux are! He really must curtail them. "If we are to walk to Dayrell—" he cries, and Molly laughs at his injured tone.

"Good-bye, Olive. My lord is consumed with impatience. Remember, you have promised to spend a few days with us."

"Yes."

It is cool now. Molly takes off her hat in the high-banked shady lane, and permits the fresh zephyrs to frolic and coquette with her curls. How pretty she is! Her eyes have a wistful light in them; her lips are closed gravely. Rex thinks this demure mood becomes her wonderfully. Ah! it does not last. A smile dawns, and mirth banishes all seriousness.

"Rex," reproachfully, "we have not spoken for quite five minutes."

"Impossible! Molly, I am very weary, will you sit down on the grass for a moment?" persuasively.

He weary? There is no sign of fatigue in his face; but she is willing to do as he asks her. She sits down, and he flings himself beside her. Are their mouths empty of words? Silence still woos and finally intoxicates them, and

"The beating of their own hearts is all the sound they hear."

Evening grows more dusky; an owl in the wood utters a melancholy cry. Molly's hand is slid into Rex's. He holds it in a fond, firm clasp, and a magical peace comforts their souls.

Molly rouses. "Rex, has not Mr. Brabazon any people of his own?" she asks.

"None. He is the last of his race; neither his father nor his mother possessed brother or sister."

"You knew each other when you were boys?"

"Yes," meditatively, "we were together at Eton and at Oxford. His place is in Reashire. It is a tumbledown old house, with a few acres of land about it. His father and mother did not live happily. Mrs. Brabazon was an heiress; she was a hard, heartless woman. Keith gets his money from her. Brabazon *père* was not worth a thousand pounds, all told."

"I have never heard him mention his parents."

Rex picks up a stone and hurls it at a tree. "No? Keith is not given to talk of them, and they died when he was a little chap. He is a splendid fellow, a friend whose value one can hardly estimate in times of sunshine—a friend for adversity."

"But," doubtfully, "is he good-tempered?"

Rex pulls off Molly's glove and plays with her rosy-tipped, filbert-nailed fingers.

"He is not bad-tempered, Molly; but he is morbid. The Brabazons are a terribly jealous set. The green-eyed monster has little difficulty in gaining their attention. I wish Keith would marry."

"Do you regard marriage as the cure for all evils of the flesh?"

He does not heed her, does not answer her. "Sometimes I have thought," he muses, "that Olive and he—but I do not know. She is too like him, passionate and hot. Molly, he deems that my sweetheart is all my sweetheart ought to be."

"I am much obliged to him."

Rex laughs. "He believes you have the virtue which he counts the most notable of all the virtues."

"That is?"

"Faith. He fancies you will be true to me whether the world goes up or down for me."

Molly is mute. True to Rex! How

could she be other than true? The blood burns in her cheek. She trembles. Rex pillows her head on his shoulder.

"My lily love!" he whispers, "will you ever understand how divine such perfect trust as yours is to me? Oh, my darling, Heaven make me worthy of it, worthy of you!"

\* \* \* \*

In the twilight gloom of the summer sky the moon climbs, and looks down upon others besides these two lovers. Mrs. Dayrell and Keith watch it in company. They have met in the village, and Keith without a word has appointed himself Ruth's escort. Is it strange that Ruth does not notice how often her path and Keith Brabazon's path are identical? Once or twice she has commented upon the accidental meetings, but lately she has held her peace. Unconsciously she is beginning to appropriate Keith, to look for his coming as a matter-of-course. She does not divine what this may mean. She is happy, happy with a restful happiness; and she accepts her happiness gratefully, and does not seek to discover its source. But Keith, unlike her, is not blind. He comprehends that the bliss—the wildest and strangest bliss he has ever felt—which is bounding in him is love. He understands why the mere sight of Ruth is rapture to him. He loves her. How long must the love pulsing in his heart be dumb? How long will it be ere he learns whether Ruth loves him? Ruth? She is always "Ruth" in his thoughts, only "Ruth." It is desecration to think of her as Mrs. Dayrell. Rex Amyot spoke truly when he said that Keith Brabazon is of a jealous disposition. Dead though Ambrose Dayrell is, he is jealous of him. He despises himself for this contemptible weakness, and yet very fervently he wishes Ruth had never been a wife—was not a widow.

They cross 'the park; the moonlight falls in patches upon the grass, and gleams curiously upon the cedars. Ruth remarks upon the weird effect, and they slip into easy talk—talk that of itself proclaims what great strides their friendship has made. Their leave-taking is only a handshake, but the handshake is enough for Ruth.

From her chamber-window she watches him go down the avenue—watches his lithe yet powerful form with tender eyes, and wafts him a good-night wish sweeter than any she has ever breathed aloud.

Ah, Ruth! the little god has stormed and conquered that sacred citadel—your heart!

## CHAPTER IV.

CHARMINGLY shady haunt is Dayrell Wood on a hot day, for the sun cannot penetrate the thick branches of the trees that there raise their heads to the fervid heavens. Ruth, sitting upon an old oak-stump, stares at the million leaves above her, and enjoys the warm wind, oppressed with perfume, blowing around her. She has a book in her hand, but she is not reading; she is passively chewing the cud of reflection; she is absently listening to the brawling of the stream flowing over its rocky bed a few yards from her. Suddenly the stillness is cleft in twain. A bird pipes a musical strain, other birds list voices, and the wood rings with melody. What say the blithe notes to Ruth? A distressed look comes into her eyes, heavy shadows darken her face. Sighs escape her—troubled sighs, that she cannot repress. She glances furtively around her, and then takes a letter—a letter which has evidently been read and re-read—from her pocket. Tears fall upon it now, and blister its words. Impulsively she tears it into tiny strips and scatters it.

"Oh, my dear!" she murmurs softly, "I cannot and I will not deny you!" She places her hands upon her face and weeps.

"Mrs. Dayrell." Her hands drop; she jumps up in unmistakable fright. Keith Brabazon is gazing at her in dismay.

"Miss Dayrell told me I should find you here," he says; "but you are grieving."

"Yes," she answers simply; "an old pain has touched me to-day, and I was childish enough to cry over it."

He does not ask what the old pain is; he sets to work to drive it from her memory. He is subtle and skilful: as she hearkens to him her sorrow recedes, the dread fades from her face, and smiles illumine it. She forgets—forgets anguish and remembers hope.

Keith Brabazon has not pursued her purposelessly. He has something to say to her—something which so fights for audible sound that he has to work hard to restrain it. Great is the passion boiling, bubbling; great is the yearning springing within him. He cries, and his voice is so intense that Ruth looks at him in surprise, "Ruth, I am going away."

"Going away!" The light in her eyes is quenched; the sweet green duskiness of the wood changes to a darkness that is fearful.

"Yes; and I do not know when I shall come back. I may never return."

She sits silent; her hands are folded in front of her face. Keith comes into

her eyes—liquid, wonderful wells they are.

"Are you sorry?"

"Yes," vaguely, "I am sorry."

"Then, Ruth, tell me that I must, I may come back."

She does not understand him. She rises in perplexity. "Mr. Brabazon," falteringly, "I have no right to tell you that you must come back."

"No right! Oh, Ruth, who has the right if you have not? Tell me to do what you will and I will do it: my life, my love, is yours and not mine."

Her lips fall apart, she shivers from head to foot. Very gently, clasping her hands, he pours his story into her ears. Are her ears dull? I trow not. I think the passionate plaint he pleads thrills her through and through. And yet when he pauses, not having shown her all his heart, having, indeed, given her but a glimpse of the flood that is surging and seething there, she draws her hand from his hold and gazes dazedly at the leafy arch overhead.

A fierce pang stabs him. Does not she love him? "Ruth! Ruth!" he cries, with condensed emotion, "do not turn from me, do not tell me that you do not love me!"

She shakes like an aspen. Yes, she must tell him that—she must tell him that she does not love him. Ah, she cannot, she cannot! She moistens her dry lips. Is she going to faint? She is curiously giddy. She steadies herself with a supreme effort. "I did not guess—" she begins, but she never finishes that sentence. Keith Brabazon interrupts her with a rich laugh, a glad laugh. A cadence in her voice scatters his fears as chaff before the wind.

"You love me!" he says, and in his excitement he wraps his arms tightly about her, "you love me! Oh, my darling!"

The sun is shining, the birds are carolling, the flowers are blooming, men and women are working and resting, *somewhere*, but *here* two souls climb a pinnacle where there is no sun, no birds, no flowers, no human beings; they soar into a world out of the ken of ordinary folks. In overwhelming ecstasy their spirits lave; bliss fires their souls, and a silence redolent of joy buds. They move, and the movement disturbs their blessed trance. Keith sighs with the very fulness of his content.

"Ruth, I know you love me, but will you say you do?"

Ay, she is quite as willing to whisper those three exquisite words, "I love you," as he is. Keith thanks her for honouring him—thanks her in a fashion that brings the red to her snowy cheeks.

"I will be good to you, I will cherish you," he vows. "My dear, how glad I am you are my first love!"

"Am I?"

"Yes; my life was absolutely barren of love until you crossed it. Ruth, if you could say this! If you had not learned to love before you saw me!"

She gasps. She has never loved any one as she loves him. She has never drank nectar so luscious as this she is drinking now. She draws very near to him "I can say it," she assures him.

"But you married Ambrose Dayrell."

"Yes," tranquilly; "Mr. Dayrell was very kind to me. I liked him, but I did not marry him because I liked him. I married him because my father entreated me to do so. We were poor, my father was in his debt. I could not refuse to wed him. My father was dear to me, and I cared for no one. If I had known—"

She hesitates. Keith smiles. "If you had known Keith Brabazon—" he suggests.

"I should not have been Ambrose Dayrell's wife," she cries, with emphasis.

He is satisfied; he will put away all thoughts of Ambrose Dayrell for aye. Ruth is his. Mrs. Brabazon is a prettier name than Mrs. Dayrell. Mrs. Brabazon! Heaven speed the time when that title shall be hers!

"Shall you be obliged to leave Dayrell?" Ruth asks by-and-by. They have quitted the wood, and are in Copper's Lane. Leisurely they stroll, and the hedge-roses stretch out arresting arms towards them.

"Yes; but, Ruth, be you sure I shall not be away from you a day longer than I am compelled."

She nods. "Keith," she cries—and Keith Brabazon thinks her dewy lips whisper his name as no other lips could—"need any one know we are more than friends yet awhile?"

Her confusion delights him. He looks into her upturned face, and says, "You are not ashamed of your promise?"

"Ashamed? No; but it all seems unreal to me. Give me a little time to get used to the thought that you—"

"That I am to be your lord and master? Very well, Ruth. We will play sweethearts when we are alone; when we are in company you shall be Mrs. Dayrell to me, and I will be Mr. Brabazon to you."

On, on they go; and though they try with every conceivable will to lengthen out their walk, they come to the end of it at last.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mr. Brabazon has been absent from

Dayrell for a week. Olive Amyot is staying at the Manor. She and Molly revel complacently in July sunshine, but Olive, in spite of the *dolce far niente* atmosphere, does not neglect her self-imposed task. She watches Mrs. Dayrell closely and cautiously. She is persuaded that she is not as simple and straightforward as she seems. She is continually on the alert to detect her falsehood. She is desirous of detecting a flaw either in her history or her character. She hates her with a strong hatred—hates her because—but she does not admit this even to herself—she fears that Keith Brabazon cares for her. She knows something of the constant meetings between Keith and Ruth—knows, if they are nothing more, they are at least confidential friends; and she resents this knowledge, for she loves him.

Breakfast is upon the table. Through the window steals the sweet honeysuckle breeze. Molly, in a bewitching blue gown, is examining the contents of the letter-bag, and Olive—Molly's face is so beautiful, it is a sight to make an old man young—is looking at her.

Molly counts the letters. "One for Ruth, two for me," she says, and she throws Ruth's letter aside carelessly. Olive glances at it, and swift with poppy colour is her brow, neck, cheek, and chin suffused. Molly is engrossed. Olive picks up Ruth's letter. She cannot be mistaken, the writing is familiar to her; it is Keith's. She drops it as though it is dangerous, and groans dumbly.

Molly finishes her perusal of her epistles and flutters to Olive's side. "Where can Ruth be?" she cries. "I hope she will not be long. I want my breakfast."

"Is she out?"

"Yes; Neale tells me she was up and out two hours ago."

"She must be indesatigable. She was out late last night, and is up early this morning."

Molly assents. Ten minutes tick away. She rings the bell. "Has Mrs. Dayrell come in?" she asks the servant who answers her summons.

"No, Miss Molly."

"Tiresome! Olive, shall we have breakfast?"

"I can wait. Don't have it on my account; but if you——"

She pauses. Ruth is standing in the doorway. Molly exclaims, "At last! We are famishing. Where have you been?"

What is there in the question to disconcert Ruth? Olive is astonished at the unmistakable agitation she displays. She crimsoned painfully. "For—for a ramble," she stammers.

Norris brings in some hot dishes. Ruth takes her place, and her glance falls upon her letter. The bright gleam that shines in her eyes does not escape Olive. She plies her knife and fork industriously and ponders. What do these late night and early morning rambles mean? Her interest is excited; she must more than ever watch.

Ruth murmurs a word or two about household duties when they rise from the breakfast-table, and vanishes. Molly and Olive, going upstairs, are waylaid by Beevor. She has some news to communicate.

"The people have come to the Wood House," she says. "Ray told me so this morning."

"Oh! Are they young people or old?"

"I don't know. Ray saw only the servants; they are middle-aged women. The mistress will be able to tell you, Miss Molly, all about them."

The Wood House, so called because it stands in close proximity to Dayrell Wood, is the property of Mrs. Dayrell. It has been empty for many months; it is a pretty house, but its situation is lonely. A tenant, however, has been found for it. Molly is eager to hear all particulars concerning this tenant, and Olive is not indifferent. In a country place like Dayrell the smallest event receives a large amount of attention.

Ruth is in the library casting up sundry accounts, but there is a look upon her face which Olive shrewdly opines has nothing to do with the stiff columns before her. Molly plunges into her subject, as Molly plunges into everything, without finesse or circumlocution.

"Ruth, who has taken the Wood House?"

Ruth starts. A wild terror blazes in her eyes; her pen falls from her fingers and blots the clean page. "How stupid I am!" she cries. "What did you say, Molly?" Her head is bent. She is busy with the blotting-paper. Molly repeats her question, and after an almost imperceptible hesitation Ruth answers—

"A Miss Danton. She is an elderly lady, and I believe an invalid."

"Are you acquainted with her?" It is Olive who speaks. Ruth looks at her; something in Olive's face startles her.

"I have seen her," coldly and calmly. "I saw her before she took the house."

"Did not Mr. Chester let it for you?"

"He did; but I wished to have a personal interview with Miss Danton ere everything was decided. Have you any other questions to ask, Miss Amyot?"

Olive is not abashed. "No," she says demurely, "none."

Ruth presses her lips together. Miss Amyot's tone is a little insolent. She turns from her. "Molly dear," she cries, "will you go away? I have a great deal to do."

"Certainly we will; but, Ruth, do not waste all this bright morning over those disagreeable books. Remember the summer days are going very quickly."

The girls close the door. Ruth picks up her pen, but she does not resume her work. How her head aches! and how her heart aches! Molly's words echo drearily in her ears, "The summer days are going very quickly." She blanches. Will the winter days be cheerless? Nay, will not Love brighten them?

"Oh, Keith," she whispers, "if I could tell you all!"

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#### CHAPTER V.

**A**S SUDDEN shower. Molly looks at the straight lines of rain with vexed eyes. Olive smiles at her chagrin. A wet evening will mean an evening indoors, and as she has a delightful novel to read, she is not inclined to grieve over their temporary imprisonment.

"We cannot expect fine weather always," she says philosophically, as she ensconces herself comfortably.

Molly laughs rather ruefully. "Very true, Mademoiselle Olive," she cries; "but I have not had a walk with Rex for two nights, and I really need one to-night."

"I am afraid you will have to need it, dearie; there looks little likelihood of the rain leaving off."

Molly drums on the window; Olive begins her book. With the one the time passes slowly, with the other swiftly.

Presently Olive speaks. "Mrs. Dayrell must have a large correspondence," she says; "she has been three hours letter-writing."

"Oh, she must have finished long ago. I am glad you reminded me of her. I will see what she is doing." She flies off. Olive lays her novel down and muses. Tomorrow she goes home. She sighs impatiently. Her visit has not produced the results she anticipated. She thought if she lived for awhile with Mrs. Dayrell she would be sure to discover something against her. What if she has been seeking a mare's nest? What if Mrs. Dayrell's secret is a chimera of her brain? What if she has nothing to conceal? Ah, this is incredible! Too long has she hugged the idea that Ruth is not what she professes to be, to

part with it easily. She must prove that her suspicions are not baseless; she must collect evidence against Ruth Dayrell which shall convince Keith Brabazon that she is unworthy his regard. She shall not marry him. Olive's magnificent eyes scintillate; she shall not call him husband -no

Molly returns. "Well?" Olive commences. Molly has evidently failed to tempt Mrs. Dayrell from her literary labours.

"Ruth has gone out."

"Nonsense!"

"She told Hulme her head ached, and that she must have fresh air. She said the rain would hurt her less than the confinement."

Olive is silent. Molly's information is food for thought. Mrs. Dayrell has lately evinced an extraordinary liking for solitary rambles. She goes out morning and night, and does not ask any one to accompany her. Olive does not fancy that these rambles are purely constitutional, and she determines to find out whether they hide any ulterior motive. She glances at Molly. It is useless trying to infect Molly with her doubts. Molly cannot be made to see aught that Ruth does in an unfavourable light. She picks up her book, but the story no longer fascinates her. Her thoughts are distracted; the hero and heroine have lost all their heroic attributes.

Molly resumes her former position; she stares out at the glistening grass, the dripping trees, the overcast sky. Not a rift is there in the pallid heavens; the rain falls persistently. Molly's spirits sink to zero; her face grows more and more lengthy; she heaves dolorous breaths. Hey presto! transformation! Her sombre gleam disappears magically, she laughs gleefully, and utters one word—"Rex!"

Rex Amyot comes in and salutes his sister and his *fiancée*. Olive smiles at Molly's radiant visage. "You are a lucky fellow, Rex," she cries. "Molly, you will spoil him if you show him so plainly how fondly you care for him."

Molly shakes her head doubtfully. She thinks to spoil Rex is impossible. Olive is considerate; she leaves the lovers to sweet dual solitude and betakes herself upstairs. In the corridor she meets Hulme, Mrs. Dayrell's maid. Olive has known Hulme all her life. Hulme is very attached to her. She says impulsively—

"It is a nasty night. I hope Mrs. Dayrell is indoors, Hulme?"

"No, Miss Olive, she is not."

Olive studies the sky for a moment, then,

apparently to herself, she murmurs, "I wonder she went out in such weather."

"Oh, the weather would not influence my mistress. She would not have stayed in if it had been twice as bad as it is. She was restless to go out. She was hindered this morning."

"Where does she go?" Olive longs to ask the question, but her lips are not tractable. Hulme departs. Olive stands rooted to the spot. "So Mrs. Dayrell was restless to go out!" she soliloquises—"restless!"

Awkwardly she gropes in mental darkness. All at once a flashing light shows her the road to travel. She remembers it is only since the Wood House has been inhabited that Mrs. Dayrell has taken pleasure in lonely strolls. Strange she has never connected this and that together! Without a second thought she resolves to walk as far as Dayrell Wood. She is quick-fingered; she dresses herself in ulster and hat hurriedly. She will not be long absent. If Molly and Rex miss her, she must invent some story to satisfy them. She turns the key in her chamber-door and slips the key into her pocket.

She escapes from the house unperceived. The lanes are muddy; she steps carefully and cleanly. Dayrell Wood is not very alluring; the trees look grim and dull. She enters it; she cannot see any one; the mist and the damp alone greet her. She does not want to be seen; she turns into a side-path. How spectral, how very gruesome the scene is! A curious sensation worries her. She almost wishes she was safely at the Manor. Big raindrops splash through the thick branches upon her. A whispering scares her. It is but the rustling of leaves. She is absurdly nervous; she pours contempt upon herself angrily.

No one is here. Was she not foolish to imagine any one would be? Romance-reading must have crazed her. She quits the wood, and walks at a rapid pace for some minutes; then she slackens her speed. She must pass the Wood House. Very cautiously she reconnoitres before she reaches it; and it is well for her that she does. The door is open, some one is coming out of the house. Instinctively Olive draws back into the shadow. It is Mrs. Dayrell. She walks down the path; a woman-servant attends her to open the gate for her. Olive's eyes and ears are alert.

"Good night," Mrs. Dayrell says to the woman; and the listener starts, for the speaker's tone is full of tears. The woman responds, closes the gate, and retreats. With bent head Ruth wends her way in the direction of the Manor. Olive is non-

plussed. What does it all mean? Again and again she has assured herself that Ruth Dayrell is the possessor of some secret which she would shrink from disclosing; and yet now she has received sure confirmation that this is so, she is confounded. She lingers irresolutely. She must wait until Mrs. Dayrell is half-way to Dayrell ere she follows her. It is chilly; she shivers; the blood in her veins is frozen; she paces up and down. Is it safe to start homewards? No, she will stay here another minute. Ah, that minute! Five minutes later Olive congratulates herself upon her brief delay.

The door of the Wood House re-opens, and a man appears. Olive's heart beats rapidly; her head whirls, her pulses bound; it seems to her that the scent of the mystery floats in her nostrils. She crouches behind a tree; the man is coming towards her, towards the wood. She is very desirous to see him, but in the dim light this is exceedingly difficult. He is tall. He hums a line of a song. His voice is strong, rich, and young. He strides quickly past her, out of sight. Olive creeps from her lurking-place.

"He is some disreputable relative, I suppose," she says dubiously—"some one whom she is ashamed to own." The rain has ceased, she must not tarry. With fleet feet she hastens over the sloppy ground. The hall-door is not shut. No one sees her enter; she finds when she comes down into the drawing-room, where Mrs. Dayrell, Molly, and Rex are, that she has not been missed.

\* \* \* \*

"Are you glad to see me?" Keith Brabazon asks the question in a voice that plainly proclaims he knows the answer he will receive.

Ruth laughs. "Yes, I am glad," she admits.

Keith Brabazon has been at Dayrell three hours exactly, and already he has found his way to the Manor. Ruth, having received warning to expect him, has waited at home for him. He grasps her hands, and looks at her. Is she not paler than she is usually? He scans her anxiously.

"You are not well," he cries. "You have never any colour, but to-day you have lost your white bloom; you look tired—wan. What have you been doing to yourself?"

She smiles, but her smile lacks brightness. "I am quite well, and I have done nothing to hurt myself while you have been away."

"I must judge of that: when you have told me all you have done I will decide."

What has he said? Ruth's face flushes vermillion; her eyes are cast down; a strange confusion seizes her. Keith stares at her bewilderedly, he cannot avoid noticing her embarrassment.

"What is it?" he cries; "what has happened in my absence?"

"Nothing," she whispers.

"Nothing!" he echoes blankly; "then why did my words disturb you?"

She is silent: he waits for her reply; he does not dream that she will withhold from him the knowledge he seeks. Ruth raises her eyes, sees his confident expectancy, and draws her hands from his. "Do not ask me that, Keith," she cries beseechingly.

He is puzzled. "Do not ask you what? Surely, Ruth, you do not mean me to understand that something has happened to you since I saw you last which you are not at liberty to tell me."

That is exactly what she does mean him to understand. She mutters an indistinct "Yes."

He is thunderstruck; then he rallies his senses. "Foolish Ruth!" he says. "Do you think you can refuse me your confidence? Don't you know that you must confess everything to me?" There is a masterful intonation in his tone. She glances at him wistfully, appealingly. Her glance annoys him. Mysteries and concealments he abhors. Ruth must explain herself.

"Unburden your soul," he says. "I will absolve you, and not inflict a very terrible penance upon you for your sin. My darling, what is it?"

She is trembling wofully. He flings his arms around her. Her trembling ceases. "Keith, I cannot tell you," she says gravely.

Keith Brabazon wonders if his ears are playing him false. "What?" he cries.

She repeats her words, and her heart sickens as she sees his brow darken. "Ruth!"

"Don't be angry with me, Keith. I would tell you if I could, but I may not."

"You may not?"

"No. Can't you trust me? If you were entrusted with a secret, I would not wish you to divulge it even to me."

Her face, so sweetly serious, is reproachful. He cannot understand it. "If it is somebody else's secret, of course I can't insist upon your telling it to me; but I do not think you should have allowed any one to tell you aught which I may not know." Not a very gracious speech, but Ruth lets it pass. She is thankful that Keith will not press her to break the silence imposed

upon her. She leads his thoughts into other channels adroitly.

Mrs. Dayrell's engagement to Keith Brabazon has not yet been publicly announced. Molly and the Amyots know of it, but other folks only suspect that it is on the *tapis*. Olive Amyot receives the news with unshaken equanimity. There is many a slip between the cup and the lip, and betrothals are not always consummated in marriages. Olive has not forgotten Mrs. Dayrell's secret visit to the Wood House. Very industriously has she worked to discover who it is she visits there. She has ferreted out a few particulars concerning the Wood House people; she is aware that the house is rented by a Miss Danton, and that the gentleman occasionally seen there is her brother. Miss Danton lives a secluded life; she receives no visitors, and she goes out seldom.

Olive Amyot is gardening. Keith Brabazon is lounging near her. Olive, in a cool, creamy morning robe, looks very beautiful. She is in one of her best moods, sparkling and brilliant. Keith, watching her lovely face, so full of light and mirth, finds conversation very enjoyable. He wonders a little at her exuberant gaiety, for she is very gay; not the faintest suspicion has he that it is assumed. It is assumed, nevertheless. Olive's heart aches, though her tongue discourses the prettiest nonsense; her spirit is heavy, easy though her laugh is. If she could cry aloud her bitter agony—ah, only the silence must hear her crying and wailing!

She stands erect and pulls off her gloves. "There, I have finished for this morning," she says.

He looks at her and assumes surprise. "Finished? You have only just commenced. I am afraid you are lazy, Olive."

"Lazy! Well, if I am, does it become you to accuse me of laziness? You have leaned against ~~that~~ tree one half-hour."

"Have I? Olive, I will lean no longer if you will bestow your company upon me, and come with me for a walk."

She consults her watch. "Are you not due at the Manor?" she asks.

"No; Ruth has some business to transact—has to hold an interview with the steward, I fancy, consequently I am under orders not to seek her society."

"Then stay you here while I change my hat."

He remains where she leaves him, and his dreams are so pleasant that she seems to reappear almost as quickly as she vanishes.

"Where shall we go?" she says, when they reach the high-road.

"Anywhere," he responds equably. "Do you lead and I will follow."

She nods, and turns towards Dayrell Wood. It is a delightful day—a day when it is enough

"Not to be doing, but to be."

White clouds trail snowy draperies over the blue heavens; winds kiss perfumes from flower-lips; bees fly hither and thither honey seeking, and the birds in impassioned cadences sing songs of sunshine.

Through a mist of pain and regret Olive sees the exquisite radiance about her. What is all the glory of the world to her? the glory which she longs to crown her life will never crown it. Oh, if the love she has given unasked, unsought, were returned! Oh, if in Keith Brabazon's breast thrilled a love responsive to hers! Why does he not love her? Why is Ruth Dayrell preferred to her? She is far more lovely than Ruth. Ah! it is not loveliness that compels love, and Cupid shoots his arrows at random.

The grey walls of the Wood House are refreshingly cool to look at; the verandah wreathed in green is picturesque. Keith comments upon its attractiveness, and Olive assents. She glances at the house; some one is standing against the window. An exclamation escapes her. Vexatious—the person moves out of sight!

"I thought it was Ruth," she cries.

"Ruth!" Mr. Brabazon stares. "What should bring Ruth to the Wood House?"

Olive's watching orbs open widely. "Mrs. Dayrell visits at the Wood House," she says.

"No."

"Yes. I have seen her on several occasions leave or enter the Wood House. I presume Miss Danton is a friend of hers."

"But she has never mentioned her as a friend or otherwise."

"Not to me, certainly; but then Mrs. Dayrell does not trouble me with any superfluous conversation—she does not like me. Of course *you* know all about Miss Danton. Keith, enlighten me a little concerning her. Who is she? and is the gentleman whom I have seen her brother?"

Keith is confused. Of what is Olive talking? "You are labouring under some delusion, Olive," he declares. "Ruth does not know Miss Danton."

"She does." Olive speaks very decidedly. "You will not believe me? Ask Mrs. Dayrell, Keith, and you will find that I am right."

Ask Mrs. Dayrell! Keith knits his brows. Ay, he will ask her, and she shall answer

him. In gloomy silence he digests Olive's assertion—silence which Olive makes no effort to dispel.

Ruth Dayrell is unhappy. Across the clear horizon of her love clouds are gathering. Keith is displeased with her, and his displeasure pains her. If she could only tell him that which he craves to know! but she cannot. She is bound to secrecy and silence, and, let what will be the outcome, secret and silent she must be. She frets quietly that this is so, but she never entertains the thought that her promise may be set aside. Keith has taxed her with her intimacy with the people at the Wood House, and she has admitted that she is intimate with them; but who they are, and why she is intimate with them, she refuses to state. Keith urges her either to give up the intimacy or allow him to share it; but she will do neither, and he punishes her obstinacy with his coldness.

The days go on, the bright, sunshiny days, and Ruth's heart grows sadder and sadder. Keith should trust her; if he held some secret from her, she would trust him. She does not understand the jealousy he cannot overcome—does not understand the vague, shadowy fears that torment him.

She sits in the drawing-room alone. Molly is at the Chase. Olive has a garden-party this afternoon. Is Keith one of the party? Doubtless. Well, well, if he is amusing himself she must not grumble. She is dispirited, tears gather in her eyes, and she does not try to hinder their falling. She cries sorrowfully. Everything is out of tune; she feels very old, and yet she is young. Oh, if Keith would be kind and tender to her as he used to be! The tears come faster—big, briny tears now.

"Ruth!" It is Keith. She raises her wet, woebegone face. A great repentance seizes him as he sees it, and, without thought, he snatches her to himself, and presses her closely to his breast. His kisses rain upon her cheeks and mouth, and she lies in his embrace contented. The sun has dissolved the clouds; once again there is clear shining.

"My darling," he whispers, "you were crying."

"You seemed so cold, Keith, and it hurt me."

"I am a brute. Ruth, can you forgive me?"

Forgive him? She looks at him; ecstasy is flooding her face. Could he do anything she could not forgive? He smooths her hair from her forehead with loving hands.

"Ruth, I am a very jealous fool," he cries; "but I have no right to plague you with my jealousy. I am heartily ashamed of myself; but, my dear, I will never worry you any more concerning anything you do."

Will he not? If Ruth doubts his ability to keep his vow she does not utter her doubt. Keith laughs. "We are a foolish couple falling out about we know not what. Ruth, you must kiss me to prove that you really pardon me. My dear," gravely, "are you aware that you have never yet kissed me?"

Ruth blushes—a blush beautiful as the first flush of the morning. Keith's arms tighten around her. "Come, everything must have a beginning, and you must give me a first kiss or you will never give me a second!"

Ruth's lips, lightly folded, are tremulous. He bends his face down and she touches it shyly. His touch thrills him; he flings off every restraint, and holding her in his strong arms—

"He drew,  
In one long kiss, her whole soul through  
Her lips, /s sunlight drinketh dew." //

They are reconciled. Happy Ruth! Happy Keith! . . . . .

After this there comes a time of beatification. Ruth's voice loses its mournfulness, her face its weariness. Her blitheness rivals Molly's, and Molly is a very blithe person. Keith urges her to name the day when she will become his wife, Ruth pleads for a little longer delay; but when Molly, taking pity on Keith, adds her prayer to his, she finds resistance useless. She promises Keith that it shall be before autumn changes to winter.

Oh, the days of glamour! how fast they speed! Keith exults as they go—every new day brings him nearer the one on which he shall call Ruth wife.

He is going to London; if Ruth and he are to be wedded ere winter, there is much to be busy about. Ruth begs him to defer his journey, but he cannot. She is in the conservatory when he seeks her to bid her good-bye.

"You are going, then, Keith."

He smiles. "I must go, but I shall not be away more than a week. Don't look so grieved, Ruth, or I shall be tempted to propose that we make the journey together."

"I wish we could."

"Amen. Dear heart, we shall make the next journey together," he says, sinking his toe to a tender key. "Ruth, you are sure your love is all mine?"

She lifts her eyes to his. "I am sure."

"And you are sure it always will be all mine?"

"Keith, of course it will."

"Yes." How earnestly he gazes at her! "Ah, Ruth, I do not doubt that you love me. It is for the pleasure of hearing you say you do that I ask you."

She is mute—so mute that he marvels. What is it? She is shaking as though ague-smitten; her hands are hot as burning coals. "My darling!" he whispers.

She does not heed him. She cries out in sudden, desperate emotion: "I love you! I love you! Keith, I love you so much that I am frightened of my love. What should I do if I lost you? If any one came between us I should hate him. *Hate him!*" with a wild emphasis that startles Keith Brabazon strangely, "I could not live without you! I would rather die—would rather—" She stops abruptly. She has awakened to a sense of what she is saying, and her words sting her ears sharply. "I have talked a farrago of nonsense," she says humbly.

"Nonsense! If that is nonsense, then I will willingly listen to nonsense always. My dear, I must not linger another minute over good-bye!"

Her excitement has faded; passively she submits to his farewell, passively she receives his caresses. He puts her into a chair and leaves her.

## CHAPTER VI.

 A PLEASANT room, the windows of which open into a charming flower-garden—a room inexpensively furnished, but furnished with taste. A lady sits at work in the centre of the room; her fingers are moving rapidly, but every now and then her eyes stray to the beauty out-of-doors—the beauty of grass, leaf, and flower. She is a handsome woman, in the prime of life. Her features are regular, her complexion is good; and yet her face is not an attractive face. Her eyes are large and well-coloured, but they are undeniably hard; her lips are thin, and singularly lacking in tenderness. She looks what she most assuredly is—a selfish woman. She is Laura Danton.

Under a tree upon the lawn a man is sitting. He rises and saunters into the room. Miss Danton applies herself more determinedly than ever to her work. He flings himself into an easy-chair and watches her. He is very like her, but his face has not the strength and power hers has; the lines about his mouth are weak and irresolute, and his eyes are shifting

and uncertain. He says slowly—his voice is a wonderful voice, so rich and melodious—

"Ruth is going to be married."

"So I have heard."

Richard Danton picks up a ball of wool and unrolls it. "It will not be a good day for us when she marries," he cries.

"No," slowly.

Her deliberate enunciation irritates him. Confound it," he says, "why cannot she be content with her position? Why does she want to marry this Brabazon? Great ugly, hulking fellow he is! Laura," in unmistakable alarm, "will she be able to keep her promise if she marries?"

Laura Danton folds up her work. "I think she will keep her promise at any and every cost," she answers; "but, Richard, she must not marry."

"Must not marry. I wish to Heaven we could hinder her marrying, but we cannot."

"We must, therefore we can. Ruth is very useful to us. If she marries, the supplies will be less generous. She could not give to us as liberally as she does without her husband's knowledge."

"Oh, she will help us; remember *why* she helps us."

Miss Danton is silent; when she speaks her voice is significant. "Suppose the reason for her helping us ceases to exist."

He jumps up in genuine consternation. "Laura, do you fear?"

"Hush! not so loudly. I do not fear, because fear is compatible with hope, and I have no hope. I am *sure*, Richard. It is but a question of time. How long it will be I do not pretend to guess; it may be weeks, it may be—months."

He turns his face from her. Miss Danton puts her work-basket in order, and presently quits the room. She returns after awhile; the room is empty. She seats herself by the window, for once inclined to muse idly.

"Very curious creatures men are," she mutters. "Richard must be extraordinarily blind not to perceive what is so perceptible. Well, Ruth's marriage must be broken off before it happens; but how? how?" She frowns. She does not see any way, but a way must be made.

The door is opened hastily. Stewart, the housekeeper, enters, her face agitated.

"What is it?" Miss Danton cries, and the rapid pulsation of her heart warns her how great is the dread upon her.

"A lady has been thrown from her horse at our gates. I am afraid she is badly hurt, ma'am."

Miss Danton exclaims, but the blood which has receded from her cheeks flows

back to them. She follows Stewart. In the road upon the ground a girl is lying insensible. It is Olive Amyot.

"Call Mr. Richard," Miss Danton says. "We must take her in, we cannot do otherwise—eh, Stewart?"

"No, ma'am." Stewart runs in search of Richard Danton. Miss Danton bends over the prostrate figure. Stewart said the girl was thrown from her horse, but no horse is visible. She recognises Olive's features, and her own grow grim.

"It is unfortunate," she says—"deplorably unfortunate, but we must make the best of it."

Richard appears, and with his help Olive is carried into a sitting-room in the front of the house. The two women dismiss him peremptorily, telling him to send the housemaid for Dr. Burton. When he arrives Olive has recovered consciousness. Dr. Burton finds her arm is broken; that is the only mischief, he declares. He sets the arm, and says he will go to the Chase and tell Mrs. Amyot of her accident.

"Don't frighten mamma," Olive begs; "tell Rex to send a carriage for me."

Dr. Burton glances hesitatingly at Miss Danton. She understands his glance. "If Miss Amyot ought not to be moved," she says, "I hope she will consent to remain here until she is in a fit condition to go home."

The doctor is relieved. "It will be better for her to stay until to-morrow," he avers; "she is feverish and excited."

"But," Olive flushes, "it is very good of you to offer such kindly hospitality. Are you sure I shall be no trouble to you?"

"I am quite sure."

Dr. Burton departs. Olive sinks back upon her cushion. "You must keep very quiet, Miss Amyot," Miss Danton says; "we will do all we can to make you comfortable. I think we will turn this room into a bedroom, and not move you."

As soon as she is left alone Olive glances about her curiously. How strange, how very strange that she is in the Wood House! Perhaps at last she will be able to advance the work upon which her hopes are centred—the work of destruction. Miss Danton does not look a very promising subject to deal with. She is not likely to vouchsafe any information which she wishes to retain; but it may be that she is no friend of Ruth Dayrell's. Olive shuts her eyes, the blinds are drawn, the atmosphere is drowsy; she falls asleep.

Evening. Mrs. Amyot and Rex have both been to see Olive, and have gone. Mrs. Amyot was anxious to stay with her daughter, but Olive would not

hear of her doing so. Refreshed with food and sleep, Olive prepares for a chat with Miss Danton. Purposely, not by chance, she talks of the neighbourhood, of Molly Dayrell, and Mrs. Dayrell; purposely she enters into details concerning the bridegroom-elect, Keith Brabazon.

"He is a friend of yours?" Miss Danton remarks.

"Yes; my brother and he have been friends for many years. He is a wealthy man. Mrs. Dayrell is making a good match. He is generous, open-handed, and very much in love."

"His wife will be a lucky and happy woman."

"Yes," thoughtfully. "Keith will be a pattern husband; his nature is wonderfully free from blemish."

"Is it not absolutely free?"

"He is a man," Olive says archly; "I dare say he has more faults than I know of."

"Do you know of any?"

"I know of one—he is very jealous-tempered."

"Jealous?"

"Yes; Rex tells him that his besetting sin is jealousy, and I believe it is; fortunately, Mrs. Dayrell is not a woman to provoke it."

"No." Miss Danton is knitting in the dusk; she drops a stitch or two heedlessly. Keith Brabazon is a jealous-tempered man, and jealousy is cruel as the grave. What if he be jealous of Ruth? will he spurn her? She ponders the question seriously, even while she gossips with Olive.

\* \* \* \*

Keith Brabazon misses his train in London, consequently it is late when he reaches Dayrell. He has been detained in London five days longer than he anticipated. It seems to him, as he hastens along the odorous narrow country lane, that it is weeks and weeks since he has seen Ruth; and yet barely a fortnight ago he and she parted. If he had caught his right train he would have been able to call at the Manor to-night—as it is, he must wait, with what patience he can muster, until to-morrow to see her.

The moon gleams behind a clump of firs; the stars shine according to their varied powers, steadily, brilliantly, twinkling. The shortest way to Amyot Chase is through Dayrell Wood, and Keith, being tired, determines to take it. The wood is full of pungent smells and full of strange sounds. A jay shrieks discordantly; Philomel utters musical notes plaintively.

His thoughts wander. This time last year he did not know that there was in the wide world a woman called Ruth Dayrell. Heigho! how long has he known her? Just four months. April winds were saluting the early grain when he first saw her, and now that grain, ripe and full, is falling under the reaper's scythe. Ah, welladay! happy the wooing that is not long a-doing!

He has passed through the wood. He glances back at it as he leaves it. The moonlight has flung a light white as snow upon the quivering leaves. He stands spell-bound and gazes at the scene, and as he gazes a sound startles him. It is only the booming of the village clock; but surely Keith Brabazon's mood is an un-wontedly sensitive and over-wrought one—it drives his gladness afar from him. A curious horror creeps over him, his blood curdles and stagnates. What ails him? Is he going mad? With a violent effort he flings his horror off and resumes his walk. The springy, elastic tread has gone out of his heel; the joyous elation bounds not in his heart. If he believed in presentiments he would fancy that evil was menacing some one dear to him. Some one dear to him? There is only one on earth who is dear to him—Ruth. Is aught wrong with her? Is she—faugh! his brain must be unsettled, his imagination strangely disordered.

Voces. He pauses. A man's voice and a woman's. His ear is keen, and the speakers, whoever they are, are near him. They are only separated from him by a hedge, the hedge of the Wood House garden. The Wood House! Keith Brabazon's memory is active; a flood of recollections rush over it. Ruth has some connection with the people who live here. Why will she not tell him what the connection is? He has promised her that he will think no more of this matter—a promise easier to make than to keep. Between husband and wife there should be no concealments. Husband and wife! His face burns. Ruth will tell him her secret before they are married.

Hark! who is that speaking? those tones, sweet and dulcet as they are, are very familiar to him. As one transfixed is he; he could swear that it is Ruth's voice did he not know it cannot be. Indifferent that he is laying himself open to a charge of eavesdropping, anxious to prove how mistaken the most trustworthy ear may be, in the still night he listens attentively. What is the woman saying?

"If you could guess how I suffer! Sometimes I forget it all, and I am happy; and then across my happiness comes re-

membrance, and I am ashamed. Oh, my dear, dear Cecil!"

"Hush, Ruth! I fancied I heard a step. Let me look over the hedge."

Ruth! Keith Brabazon stoops down behind some awkwardly growing blackberry bushes. He must and will understand this. A man's head appears, and after a minute is withdrawn. He has failed to see the dark, crouching figure.

"I was mistaken; no one is there. Ruth, it is useless to grieve in this fashion; the past is irrevocable. I have been a fool—a consummate fool!"

Low sobbing is the only reply. Keith grinds his teeth. It is his sweetheart, Ruth Dayrell, who, so late, is away from her home with—Who is this man with her? What is he to her? His fingers twitch nervously. If he could grapple with him!

"Ay, I was a fool," the lusciously melodious voice repeats; "and if you had flung me off I could not have blamed you."

"No, no."

"It would have been what I deserved. But, for the sake of those days when we were glad and innocent together, for the sake of my love—"

Does she silence him? His voice is stayed, and in the quiet that intervenes dangerous thoughts riot through Keith Brabazon's mind. They pass out of his hearing; he does not move—it seems to him that his limbs are lifeless. They have returned.

"I cannot stay any longer, and you must not expect me every evening. I will come when I can; but Mr. Brabazon is coming back."

"I understand. Let me open the gate for you." Another minute and Ruth's slim form appears. Keith watches it until it glides out of sight.

It is very late when he gets to Amyot Chase, and he is very weary and footsore—weary and footsore with aimless wandering. A brief chat with Rex Amyot, and he is off to bed—to bed, but not to sleep. All night he tosses and turns restlessly and wakefully; with the first dawn of morning he rises. Olive does not come down until noon, and she is surprised to find Keith in the library. He greets her warmly, tells her how sorry he was to hear of her accident. Her arm is still in a sling, but she declares it is mending famously. She explains to him how it occurred. Daphne reared and threw her; fortunately, where succour was to be had—at the gates of Wood House. The Wood House people were very good to her; they were genuine Samaritans. They not only took her in and sent for the doctor, but they nursed

and entertained her for one day and night. Keith's attention is riveted by the concluding portion of her narrative. He flings aside his paper impetuously.

"Olive," he cries hoarsely, "who are these Wood House people?"

"The mistress is a Miss Danton," she begins glibly, and the hectic crimsonos her cheek. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I must know, Olive. If you refuse to answer me I will find out elsewhere. Ruth knows them—is very intimate with them; what are they to her?"

How often has he reiterated this question! the very sound of it enrages him. Olive trembles; his face is distorted with passion, his eyes lurid.

"Miss Danton knew Mrs. Dayrell years ago," she falters. "She says her brother was—oh, I cannot tell you, Keith, you will be happier without the knowledge."

He bends over her: she quails beneath his gaze, and his breath scorches her. "Tell me," he cries authoritatively—"tell me; do not torture me. Her brother was?"

"He was Mrs. Dayrell's lover."

"I must have an explanation." Keith Brabazon confronts Ruth Dayrell. She, all the delight dying in her face, looks at him. He has told her in frigid words what he saw and heard last night, and now he demands that she shall account to him for her presence in the Wood House garden, and inform him who was her companion.

Greyness steals over her cheeks, her lips are chalky, her faculties are all strung and tense. "You promised me, Keith, that you would never ask me this," she reminds him.

"I retract my promise. I must know who the man is with whom I saw you last night. You have told me you have no brother; is he a cousin?"

"No."

"Ruth," flinging his harshness to the winds, and binding his arms about her, "ease my heart of the cruel doubts fretting it."

She wrenches herself from his clasp. His words pain her grievously. "Do you mistrust me?" she cries.

Does he mistrust her? He glances at her. How noble her straight, upright figure is! How pure her pale, oval face! Surely she is a woman to be trusted to the death. What was it Olive said? *He*, that man, was her one-time lover. He hardens himself.

"It is not a question of trust," he says coldly; "I should not be justified in allow-

ing you to refuse me an explanation. My wife must be above suspicion."

White as the driven snow is she, a fierce light is a-shine in her eyes ; her pride—for underneath her gentleness passionate pride lies—is on fire. "Enough," she cries. "I hope, Mr. Brabazon, your wife will be above suspicion. I shall never be your wife." She slips the ring—his ring—from her finger and offers it to him. He stares at it—stares at her stupidly. He does not want her ring.

"Ruth!" he cries, in a jangled, discordant voice ; but she plugs her ears. His doubt of her has stung her to the quick. Not for worlds now would she deign to persuade him that she is worthy of him—worthy of his love.

"You will release me from my engagement to you," she says, and her accents are chill. "I cannot marry you."

"You cannot marry me?"

"No."

Will he never take his eyes—his burning, penetrating eyes—from her face? He must go, she must get rid of him, or her composure will forsake her. "I have thought," she says deliberately, "for some little time that I was too hasty in consenting to be your wife. I am sorry—but you will set me free?"

Her quiet, even tone goads him to madness. He dashes the unoffending ring down. "So you are tired of me!" he cries. "You have amused yourself awhile with me, and now it is time I stepped aside for another. Well, well, so be it. I am obliged to you for my dismissal."

He turns from her—turns and pauses. Is he the victim of nightmare? It cannot be that Ruth and he are friends, sweet-hearts no longer. He casts another look at her, and anguish smites him. She perceives his anguish, but she does not relent. Without another syllable he vanishes, and Ruth, falling upon her knees, moans despairingly . . . . .

Eight hours later, one hour short of midnight, and Keith Brabazon suddenly wakes to a sense of complete exhaustion. He has been walking ever since he left Ruth—walking unceasingly ; and when he halts he is astonished to find that he is standing exactly where he stood the night before. He looks with dim eyes at the low-roofed house, and over him rushes a sickening sense of desolation.

"Oh, Ruth! Ruth!" his lament is voiceless. He bows his head upon his arms and is still. Hark! Some one is in the garden. Is the scene of last night to be re-acted? He lifts his head, and his pain shrivels in the furnace of wrath that kindles.

It is Ruth—Ruth in whom he has believed—Ruth whom he has loved with a mighty love. A strong adjective escapes him. Fool that he has been to think her pure ! fool to think she cared for him ! She has but trifled with him while the jocund summer season has tarried. Away for ever with all hope, away with it—alas ! it drops dead as he hears the words she speaks.

"How can I let you go?" she cries, and the sweet August breeze seems tainted with her syllables. "Oh, my dear, my heart is breaking!"

"If I could stay," the man answers—"but I cannot, I dare not. I heaven bless you, my love!"

His love! Keith Brabazon mutters a curse. His hearing is strained. It seems to him that Ruth's face is very near to this man's face. A murderous desire seizes him. If he could but slay this man to whom Ruth is clinging, this man who is whispering—

"It is dangerous for you to be here. Laura will be angry with me for persuading you to come out ; but—but I thirsted to take a last kiss of you, my darling. Oh, my darling ! I have sinned against you. I have been very cruel to you. I can see now how cruel I have been ; but, at least, I have always loved you."

"Yes, yes."

"You will forgive me."

"Forgive you? I love you."

Keith Brabazon groans. He has heard enough, he will get away. But in spite of this determination he lingers. Some spell roots him to the spot.

"You will write to me?" Ruth is pleading. "Remember how desolate I shall be without you."

"Yes ; but perhaps I may be able to send for you quickly. Oh, my dear ! I wish my heart were not so heavy. I deserve my punishment ; nevertheless it is a hard punishment—a fugitive and a vagabond ! Come, let us go in. I am in a maudlin mood. To-morrow I must pluck up spirit." He laughs, a wild, reckless laugh. She strives to soothe him. By-and-by they leave the garden, and quietness descends.

Quietness. Keith Brabazon stands as one stunned for many minutes. When he moves, he staggers and flings himself upon the dry ground. Clouds cover the face of the moon, the stars gleam pitifully, the short summer darkness merges into morning light. Keith Brabazon stirs not. He is fighting a terrible fight—a fight that threatens to destroy his chivalry and gentleness. He is wrestling with his love—heaping upon the emotion, so sacred a little while ago, epithets of scorn and shame.

He gathers himself together and rises. His eyes are bloodshot, his face ashen. He gazes about him vacantly; then, with slow and lagging steps, he turns towards Amyot Chase.

### CHAPTER VII.

**M**AY. Apple-trees and pear-trees are covered with leaves. Olive Amyot is standing in the Amyot orchard surveying the wealth of bud and blossom. She is Olive Amyot, spinster, still, and likely to remain Olive Amyot, for she is hard indeed to please. She has refused several good offers. Her friends, commenting upon these refusals, warn her that she will have to take the crooked stick at last; but she only smiles at them carelessly, and heeds them not. Her beauty is as imperial, as bewitching, as it ever was; her admirers declare it is more bewitching. Certainly it is wondrous. Look at her—at her dark, *riant* loveliness, at her supple figure, at her exquisite colouring. She is a picture you will do well to feast your eyes upon, a picture of grace and delight. She has a letter in her hand which she holds with caressing fondness; her face lights up as she glances again at its oft-read words. Keith is coming back. She has waited for him through all the dreary winter—waited hopefully, patiently; and her hope and patience are now to be rewarded—he is coming.

Dayrell Manor is closed. Mrs. Dayrell is away; Olive rejoices over her absence. Keith must have forgotten her. Ah! if her face and form still live in his memory, it is time that another face and form effaced them. Without a rival she must, she will win him. She loves him; her love shall subdue his errant love. She goes towards the house, her eyes a-shine, her cheeks carmine-flecked; but ere she reaches the house she pauses in a sudden tumult of gladness. Keith is here! Oh, the ecstasy of that moment! He takes her hands and holds them in his, as we hold the hands of a friend whom for long we have not beheld. She gazes at him, her eyes dewy.

"You have come sooner than we expected you," she says.

"Have I come too soon?"

"Too soon! Heigho! Olive's laugh is tremulous. "No, no," she cries, "you could not come too soon."

She looks at him. He is changed—so changed that it would be easy to believe it is years and not months since last they met. His dark hair is sprinkled with grey; there are many lines, grim and harsh, graven upon his face that were not there formerly.

Olive's lips quiver. "You have been ill?" she says.

He shakes his head. He has suffered the sickness of disappointment, but no other ailment has touched him. Olive understands.

"Have you seen mamma?" she asks.

"Have you had any refreshment?"

"Yes, to both questions. Olive, I am surprised to hear that Molly and Rex are married."

Olive's eyelids fall over her eyes. "Rex gave Mrs. Dayrell no peace until she consented. Molly was not well: the doctors declared she needed change of air and scene, and Rex insisted that no change would do her good unless he shared it."

"They are abroad?"

"In France; they will be home shortly."

A thrush bursts into song. Keith and Olive saunter over the grass, and talk as folks do who have been long apart. Olive handles the conversational ball skilfully. Keith is not conscious of constraint. He chats of old times, old days, as though no vinegar were mingled with the waters of recollection. Olive, listening to his cheery gossip, marvels whether she has been labouring under some hallucination. Keith could not have loved as she deemed he loved, or his words would not be so blithe and kindly. She has tortured herself causelessly. Well, the torture is over, the longing for his coming is at an end—he is here, *here!* She sighs a soft sigh of utter content. With him beside her, Paradise is not distant.

The days glide as days shod in silken slippers must. Each day is dressed in comely garb; each day breaks with a "rose-flush tender, a thrill, and a quiver." Olive lives as one in a musical dream. She recks of nothing. She cares neither for what is behind nor before. She is satisfied

"To live and love to-day."

And what is Keith Brabazon's state of being? He is as one under the influence of opiates. To come to Dayrell was a sore pain to him, verily the bursting open of old wounds. Cleverly he masked his feeling—so cleverly that Olive is to be pardoned for thinking his love for Ruth is dead. His love dead? It is alive—oh, the pity of it! Will it ever die? He has thrust it through with the sword Distrust, but he has not slain it: he cannot slay it; it is immortal. If he shall see her in the flesh, how shall he endure the sight of her? He will not see her. When she returns he will take flight, he will leave these green pastures, he will leave—will he leave Olive?

Keith Brabazon has discovered Olive's secret. In vain does he try to deceive himself; in vain does he try to assure himself that she merely likes him as a friend, he cannot blind himself to the fact that she loves him. This knowledge renders him very tender towards her; and if she mistakes his tenderness she is scarcely to blame.

They are on the water, and—

"Against the greening sunset gold  
Die out the crimson-purple bars;  
The day is gone, the night is near—  
A day of flowers, a night of stars."

Olive trails her hand through the blue water. Keith looks at her with amaze. Her beautiful face, with its glowing, passionate orbs, with its ripe scarlet lips, is turned wistfully towards the west; her graceful figure is drooping; there is a hint of sadness in her attitude. Reproach lays hold of his heart-strings.

"Olive," he says, with an inflection in his voice that stirs her soul divinely, "let me share your dream."

He is unprepared for the effect of his words. She starts, and emotion burns and breathes visibly, and the crimson blood stains her face. Keith Brabazon is mute. What shall he, what can he, say? Eloquent words leap to his tongue, but they are unspoken. Another face, a lily-fair face, he sees in the clear river water. He chokes a groan. Olive cries, covering her confusion swiftly—

"My dream was a tangle of vague thoughts, and not one of the thoughts was worth thinking. Keith, has mamma told you that I have persuaded her to stay here this season, instead of going to London?"

"Ay, she has told me; but, Olive, will you not crave for the Row and the Opera before the season is half over? Will not the dear delight of tranquil nights and fervid noons pall upon you speedily?"

The water drips in big golden drops through her fingers. "No," she responds, musingly; "I am tired of the bustle of town: it is the same bustle always, the same revolving whirl, the same turning day into night, and night into day. I am getting old, I suppose, for certainly I am very weary of Society."

"Getting old," he laughs. "Olive, Time treats you very handsomely. Have you woven your meshes of fascination about him? If he touches you it is only to robe you with new glory."

Very ardent is his gaze. Olive's eyes are downcast: love is beginning to dawn in his breast—at last, at last!

Keith Brabazon lingers out-of-doors to

smoke a cigar when Olive goes in. Slowly he saunters; he is debating an important question—a question decided when he says, "I will ask her to be my wife."

\* \* \* \*

"Molly—Mrs. Amyot!"

Molly Amyot laughs. Keith Brabazon bows respectful homage as he looks at her. She is in excellent health now, strong and blooming; in excellent spirits also, gleeful and gay.

"I have nursed her well—eh, Keith?" Rex says complacently.

"Indeed, you have. If you want another nursing job Mrs Amyot will recommend you."

Rex puts up his hands. "Another nursing job!" affrightedly. "Thank you, my boy, I shall never want another. Molly has worn out my nerves, my patience."

Molly springs towards him; he vanishes ere she can reach him. She says equably, "Rex is very absurd. How long have you been at Dayrell, Mr. Brabazon?"

"A fortnight"

Molly is silent. She stares at the peacock sedately strutting upon the terrace, and then furtively she glances at Keith. He meets her glance. She colours. He guesses her thoughts—she is thinking of Ruth. Hastily and hap-hazard he utters the first remark that occurs to him. Molly passes it by contemptuously. She has something to say to him, and whether he is willing or not he must hear it. Boldly she takes the bull by the horns.

"Are you aware that Ruth has been very ill?" she asks, plunging into her subject with considerable sang froid.

"Ruth ill?" His equanimity is disturbed. She perceives this and rejoices.

"Yes," emphatically. "It was her illness which brought us home. I received such unsatisfactory reports that I was frightened. We went to see her before we came on to Dayrell, and were thankful to find her, though very sadly, out of danger."

"But where is she?"

"Where she has been ever since she left Dayrell—at Clitheroe. Her sister died there."

"Her sister!" Keith is manifestly surprised. "I did not know she had a sister."

"Oh!"—into the interjection is compressed a volume of astonishment. "Mr. Brabazon," abruptly, "why did you and Ruth part?"

"Why did we part?" Keith flinches. "Mrs. Amyot, it will serve no purpose to stir up that. We have parted; we are strangers to each other; and I hope we shall continue to be strangers."

"Yes." Molly is not disconcerted. "You were jealous of *some one*, and you lost your faith in her."

A flush reddens Keith Brabazon's forehead, an angry gleam comes into his eyes. "You will excuse me, Mrs. Amyot," he says stiffly, "if I remind you that this conversation is very unpalatable to me."

She nods. "Of course, but," with sudden change of tone, a sudden earnest gravity, "you must not refuse to listen to me—you have done Ruth a great wrong."

Keith's jaw falls. "No, by Heaven!" he cries, "it was she who wronged me, not I her."

"You think so? You err. You left her because—"

"She bade me leave her, she dismissed me. Mrs. Amyot, I am sure you mean kindly, but you will do no good by meddling with this."

He waives his interruption aside. "Ruth told me that she had broken her engagement with you. I asked her why. She would not tell me, but by putting one thing and another together I found out. You believed she was entangled with a quondam lover. You were jealous of an imaginary rival."

"Not of an imaginary rival," he cries; but Molly protests—

"Of an imaginary rival. The man of whom you were jealous was Ruth's brother-in-law."

Too dazed is Keith to articulate one word. Molly goes on pitilessly. She remembers how Ruth has suffered through Keith Brabazon's insane jealousy, and she has no mercy.

"Poor Ruth!" she says, "she has been sinned against all along. For her father's sake she married my father, for her sister's sake she lost her lover. Ruth's mother—but do you care to hear the story?"

"Molly!"

Molly's heart is *very* impressionable, and it is now melted. The wrung look of his face tells her how real his love for Ruth is. She says in less icy accents: "Her mother died when Ruth was only seven years old, leaving Ruth and her twin-sister Cecil to do as best they could without her. They did but badly. Mr. Lister, their father, was not unkind to them, but he was a man of the world, and he neglected them. Their education was desultory, of necessity, for their father's habits were nomadic; they were ever roving and roaming. They grew up into two beautiful and attractive girls. My father fell in love with Ruth, and she, liking him, was not disobedient when Mr. Lister bade her marry him. She knew nothing of a grand

passion, nothing practically or theoretically. She had read no novels, and she had had no girl-companions to instruct her in *affaires du cœur*. Mr. Lister was ill—he was dying; but Ruth had no suspicion of that—he was poor, and my father's purse was deep, and he was a generous man. It was no wonder that he won Ruth's affection—won her hand. He was very much older than she was, but nearly all the men she had known had been old; his age did not in any way affect or vex her. They were married, and for the first time in their lives Ruth and Cecil were separated. Mr. Brabazon," Molly's eyelashes are wet, "I can never make you understand, let me try as I may, Ruth's love for her sister. She loved her with a mother's love, with a love protecting and caressing—loved her with a love as boundless and as unfathomable as the sea. Judge, then, if you can, her dismay when three weeks after her wedding she received a letter from Cecil, saying that she had married Richard Wilde, a man whom Ruth knew to be a gambler, a *vaurien*. He had been acquainted with the Listers some months, but Ruth had seen nothing to warn her that he cared for Cecil, or Cecil for him. Yet so it was. Cecil's face had captivated him, and he, not being a man who would forego anything he desired, had persuaded Cecil to marry him secretly; he was aware that Mr. Lister would never give his consent to their union. Cecil was not difficult to persuade. She loved him—loved him too well. A base villain was he, his conduct was detestable. As soon as the news of Cecil's marriage reached them, my father and Ruth started for the town where Mr. Lister was residing. When they arrived they found matters much worse than they had anticipated. Richard Wilde was in the hands of the police: he had been arrested upon a charge of *orgery*."

"Ah!"

"Cecil's anguish was awful to witness, and the blow was too much for Mr. Lister in his feeble condition; he sank under it and died. Richard Wilde was brought to England and tried, and sentenced to two years' imprisonment. The sentence was light, on account of some extenuating circumstances connected with his crime."

"His unhappy wife?"

"Ay, if it had not been for Ruth she must have died. No one had known of her marriage, and when Richard Wilde was arrested, he prayed my father and Ruth to keep it a secret. It was easy to do this, for Cecil lost her reason. She was not violently mad, she was tractable and docile; but her memory was a blank, her

mind chaos. My father was very good to Cecil, and consequently very good to Ruth. He established Cecil in a quiet house with Richard Wilde's sister to look after her comfort, and a strong female keeper to prevent her harming herself or others. The keeper was not needed, but it was wise to provide against all possible danger. Cecil Wilde's mind eventually recovered its balance, but before this happened my father died. Ruth could not come to Dayrell and leave Cecil behind her : she would have fretted herself into her grave had she done so, and Ruth could not bring her with her. No one had ever heard of Cecil here, and to explain who she was and tell her history would have been exceedingly painful. The doctors had feared that if she recovered her reason she would lose her life ; but their fears were false. She recovered it and lived. The time passed. Ruth was talking of paying Dayrell a short visit, when Richard Wilde appeared. He had borne his punishment—it was over, and he had come to claim his wife. Ruth was bitterly opposed to Cecil's acknowledging his claim, but Cecil could not resist him. He was her husband, and she could not dwell apart from him. He had sinned, but she loved him. Was she right or wrong ? Ruth thought she was wrong, and passionately declared she would not call Cecil sister if she called Richard Wilde husband. Cecil was broken-hearted, but she clung to Richard Wilde. Ruth, her wrath smouldering in her bosom, came to Dayrell, and with us she tasted a happiness sweeter than she had recked existed. I need not tell you how much you had to do with this happiness. But the happiness, sunny though it was, was not undimmed. Cecil broke the silence between Ruth and herself, and Ruth, in her new-born bliss, put away her anger and restored her sister to her old place. Ah me ! if Richard Wilde had not been one of the principal actors in this drama all might have ended well. I have said he was a gambler : his imprisonment did not cure him of this vice. Once he was free, he found his way quickly to the card-tables. He gambled and lost. Every penny with which Ruth supplied Cecil he flung away ; and at last came a pitiful letter from Cecil, saying that she was ill and in want. Ruth sent her money, and wrote to Miss Wilde asking for a full and true account of her sister's position. Miss Wilde answered at length, and declared that Cecil's days would be very few if she remained where she was. After much thought and consultation it was arranged that Cecil and Miss Wilde should come to England and inhabit the Wood House.

Ruth felt she should know no peace unless Cecil were near her. They came, and Richard Wilde came too. He did not live altogether at the Wood House. Dayrell did not suit him as a permanent residence, he preferred town to country. He visited his wife occasionally ; he would stay for days with her. It was he whom you saw with Ruth ; it was of him you were jealous.

A pause. Keith Brabazon has to steady his tone ere he asks, "Was Cecil like Ruth ?"

"Something ; but, according to Ruth, she was far more beautiful. In figure they resembled each other, and their voices were so alike, no one could distinguish them."

The light that illuminates Keith Brabazon's comprehension is so brilliant that it dazzles him. Did he mistake Cecil's voice for Ruth's voice ?

"I think"—Molly speaks as though weighing every word—"Miss Wilde was very anxious that Ruth should not marry you. She seems to have influenced Cecil to extort from Ruth a solemn promise that she would never disclose the fact of her existence. She averred that if it were known she was a felon's wife she should die, and Ruth did not think she exaggerated. She vowed that she would regard Cecil's secret as her own secret, and she kept her vow, though the keeping it cost her dear."

Dumb is Keith. Molly is startled at his pallor : she concludes quickly—

"Cecil died shortly after you left Dayrell. Ruth, noble Ruth, had offered Richard Wilde a last chance. He had told her if he could go abroad he could and would retrieve the past. She found him the means to go, and when he was gone she took — you had gone also — Cecil to Clitheroe, in the vain hope that the sea-air might strengthen her. Cecil died of consumption or heartbreak : it was one or the other of these maladies—I imagine the latter."

Silence, supreme silence. Molly's tears are running down her cheeks. "It was by accident I came to know all this. Ruth told me she was nursing a sick friend, and I believed her, and remained contentedly at Dayrell. One night, however, without any apparent cause, I was very troubled concerning her, and I determined to start in the morning for Clitheroe and see how she was. When I reached Clitheroe I saw Cecil. She was dying. Ruth, by her wish, told me who she was. Cecil took a fancy to me, and made a confidant of me. She told me all this that I have told you. Ah ! she told me much that I can never

tell you. Poor, poor Cecil! She had guessed that Ruth's fealty to her had injured her. She said Ruth was changed. She begged me, if it was in my power, to empty her heart of anguish and fill it with joy. I should have written to you but for Ruth's entreaties, and I thought you deserved to suffer. But she is unhappy, and life is so short at the longest. Oh, Keith!" She bursts into sobs. Is he deaf? he does not heed her. He stares at the bright shafts of sunshine stretching up along the ceiling; stares at the sunbeams upon the carpet. Feeling he has none—only a blunt sensation of unreality. A curious singing in his ears, a disagreeable nausea, frets him. He walks languidly to the window; he must have air—air!

He is in a chair. Molly is standing over him with a frightened face. "Water," he gasps, and she flies for some. He drinks it eagerly, and looks at her with a faint smile.

"I am better."

"Yes"—a very scared yes. How quiet it is! Why do not the birds sing? A spasm of agony contracts Keith Brabazon's face. He grips Molly's hand so fiercely that he hurts her.

"Is it true?" he cries.

"Yes, it is true," she says softly.

"Oh, fool! fool!" His voice is the voice of an old man. Molly forgets how blamable he has been, she forgets that she is angry with him, and, woman-like, she essays to comfort him.

"She will forgive you," she whispers.

"Forgive me? I cannot ask her for her forgiveness, I do not deserve it."

A whirlwind of wrath lays hold of Molly, two lurid sparks dart from her eyes. "You do not deserve it," she says, with cutting scorn; "but, Keith Brabazon, must you always remember your miserable self? She loves you."

## CHAPTER VIII.

**R**UTH DAYRELL sits upon a huge stone gazing idly at the incoming tide. She is convalescent now, but you have only to look at her thin face, her thin body, to understand how ill she has been. Her eyes are dull, her cheeks white; but as tears have been her meat and drink for very many days and nights, this is not wonderful. She sighs as she listens to the plaintive lap of the waves: how melancholy and sad everything is! Cecil is dead—beautiful Cecil, whom she loved so profoundly. Keith? Ah, he has vanished from her ken. She murmurs—

"Oh, my lost—my lost! The blooms Of passion, lightly rooted, swiftly die, Lacking the nurture of the steadfast heart."

Inconstant and fickle is the heart of man, surely! He loved her—loved her? Is it love that loves for a week, for a day? He has found another love very speedily. He will marry Olive: Olive's letter to her plainly proclaims this. The lines ring with fairy wedding bells. Well, may he, may she, be happy. If—she thrusts that thought aside. What good pondering upon what might have been? She must take up her life, her maimed, marred life, and live it bravely. Thank Heaven she is not bereft of all gladness; she has Molly to care for; and perhaps some day—some day in the distant future—Keith may learn she was not the false creature he deemed her. She has pardoned his doubt of her long ago, but she would like him to know that she was not guilty of the sin with which he accredited her. If only she loved him less! She must love him less. Ah! when he is Olive Amyot's husband she will pluck her love out of her bosom.

She rises—she is stiff with sitting; slowly she wends her way to her solitary home. How lonely it is to take tea alone! Her appetite, never good, is worse than usual. She trifles with a dainty slice of bread-and-butter, and leaves it upon her plate. She is unwontedly dull. Is evil hovering in the air? She chides herself for the depression she cannot conquer. Nothing of much importance can happen to her—all the happening is over. Her existence henceforth will be as dull as a sluggish stream. She smiles as she pictures herself passing the milestones—thirty, forty. She will be a sedate, middle-aged woman; a placid old woman.

She is curiously restless. She will go out again—a walk will soothe her irritated nerves. She rings for her bonnet; her maid wishes to go with her, but she refuses her company. "I shall not be out long," she says.

Hulme is not accustomed to a humour such as this. Ruth is not given to excitement or agitating emotion. She looks after her uneasily. "Is her illness returning?" she cogitates. "I will write to Miss Molly, and ask her to come here. I wish we were back at Dayrell."

Ruth is wishing the same. As she paces the rough and uneven street, the homesickness she has so long suppressed overcomes her. She is wearying for the familiar faces, the familiar voices. Ah! she cannot go home until Keith has left; she is not strong enough to see him yet; the mere thought of him, alas! still brings the hot

blood to her cheek. She must wait—wait until her ill-regulated, struggling heart is under control, until she is able to meet him without distress.

It is dark : the last faint gleam of gold has faded from the sky when she stands before the door of Myrtle Cottage again. Hulme cries out in dismay at sight of her white face. Ruth allows herself to be undressed ; she is tired. Hulme's fingers are busy, suddenly they stop, and she says, "Mr. Brabazon called while you were out, ma'am."

"Mr. Brabazon!" Ruth's voice is shaky and muffled. Apparently Hulme does not notice anything unusual in it.

"Yes, ma'am," phlegmatically ; "he said he was very glad you were better, and he bade me give you this."

She fetches a note which is lying upon a side table. Ruth takes it from her, but she does not open it until she has departed, and even then she sits with the envelope in her hand, not daring to break its seal. At length she rallies her courage. Very short is the epistle—only three or four lines. It is but a petition for an interview with her in the morning. Ruth, silly soul! lifts the letter to her mouth and presses her lips to the bold, characteristic handwriting.

"Oh, my darling!" she cries, in rapturous delight, "you want to see me once more!"

She does not woo sleep to-night. Wide awake she lies, seeing visions no pen could aptly describe, no brush fitly paint. Her blind is not drawn ; she watches with happy eyes the gleaming stars, the radiant moon sailing along her silvery pathway ; and the world glows with celestial glory for her. Beautiful hopes rise in her heart—hopes that make her weak heart strong. Keith will be with her soon. Heaviness may endure for the night, joy cometh in the morning—a joy hallowed and sanctified by the heaviness.

A faint pink flush streaks the horizon ; it is morning. A few more hours and Keith will be here ! Here ! She murmurs the word over and over, and murmuring it, wearied with her vigil, she falls asleep, and sleeps a sleep pure and light as a child's.

Noon. Ruth moves about the parlour with easy step and expectant face. She tries to occupy herself with a book, then with needlework, and lastly with music, but none of these fill her heart or her brain. Oh that Keith would hasten ! Why does he tarry ? What will he say to her when he comes ? What will she say to him ? She looks out of the window, then she draws back. He must not find her watching for him.

Hulme appears ; luncheon is ready, Luncheon? Is it so late ? She sits at the table, and takes some meat on her plate, but she is too engrossed with thought to eat it. Keith, Keith, come !

Afternoon. Hope deferred maketh the heart sick. Ruth sees no glory in the sun now, its yellow glare makes her eyes ache. Her patience is not exhausted, but it is strained to its utmost tension. The suspense is robbing her face of its colour and gladness. She ceases to pretend to busy herself ; she sits with folded hands, thinking, thinking. It is warm ; she leans back in her chair ; she is drowsy. Once or twice she makes an effort to open her closing eyes, but fatigue prevails, and she slumbers soundly, dreamlessly. The clock ticks, ticks ; the sun climbs higher and higher in the heavens ; innumerable insects wing through the ether. Ruth is deaf to all sights and sounds ; she is blind to the grisly phantom approaching towards her. Suddenly she starts up with a cry of alarm. Hulme is standing beside her.

"Oh, Hulme," she pants, "how you frightened me ! But," looking at the woman's pallid cheeks, "what is it ? You have some bad news."

"You must not fear the worst, ma'am, but Mr. Brabazon—"

Ruth springs to her feet. "Quick, tell me !"

Hulme averts her face as she answers : "He went out to bathe this morning, and he told Johnson, his man, he should be back to breakfast, as he had an important appointment to keep early in the forenoon. He did not come back to breakfast ; but this did not alarm Johnson, as he supposed Mr. Brabazon had been unavoidably detained."

"Yes."

"Nothing is known positively, only Mr. Brabazon has not yet returned, and his clothes have been found on the rocks where he left them."

Ruth's eyes are widely and blankly distended. Hulme's words are as meaningless jargon in her ears. What is she saying ? She cannot understand her. Ah ! her intelligence is not long torpid. "You mean that he is drowned?" She speaks with difficulty : a terrible weight is upon her chest ; she can scarcely breathe.

"Johnson is afraid—" Hulme commences, and then something in Ruth's haggard face touches the spring of her tears.

Ruth observes not her weeping. She rocks herself to and fro, and mutters apathetic, "He is drowned, drowned ! Keith, my love." Her lips fashion the

last word inarticulately. With a scream of horror Hulme catches her mistress as she falls fainting.

\* \* \* \* \*

Hulme has telegraphed for Mr. Amyot and his wife, urging them to come at once to Mrs. Dayrell. Ruth has seen Johnson, and he has not dissipated the dread Hulme whispered. His master, he says, was a capital swimmer. If evil has overtaken him he must have been seized with cramp or some fatal illness. Respectfully he reminds her that it is early to give up hope of his being alive. Ah ! that Ruth dares not believe. She thanks him for coming to her, and dismisses him. Hope ! how can she hope ? Her heart is paralysed. She is convinced that Keith is dead.

The sun sets and rises. Ruth gazes at the sunrise with awed eyes. Is it possible that yesterday at sunrise she was exultantly happy ? Yesterday ! It seems ages since she waited for Keith to come to her. She eats no food, she sleeps not, neither does she weep. The doctor attending her is well-nigh distracted ; her calm immobility is worse than the most frenzied wailing. He tells Hulme that she must be made to shed tears, but Hulme declares she cannot make her. She feels her words, so commonplace and trite, are not words to move a pulseless heart, to melt a frozen soul. She wanders about aimlessly, and prays very fervently for Molly's arrival. She will not be long before she comes. Mr. Amyot has answered her telegram ; they are on their way ; they are travelling by express to Clitheroe.

"My darling !" It is Molly who speaks. Ruth gazes at her with dim eyes. Why is she here ? Ah ! Hulme told her she had sent for her. She shrinks nervously. She must, she will hide her anguish. Molly takes her chill hands in hers, and insists upon pillowing Ruth's weary head upon her breast. Rex Amyot quits the room noiselessly. Ruth and Molly will be better without him. For awhile there is a great stillness between the women—a suffocating, horrible stillness ; then Molly endeavours to rekindle the fire of hope in Ruth's heart. But at her first syllable Ruth springs from her.

"No, no, Molly, don't tell me to hope," she cries. "I cannot bear that torture. Molly," feverishly, "will you talk of him ? Nobody will mention him to me, and—and if I may speak of him I shall go mad. Mad!" drearily. "Would it be very terrible to lose one's mind and one's memory ?"

Molly shivers, and, not knowing what to say, kisses Ruth's wan face.

"You saw him lately ; why did he want to see me ?" Molly explains. In tender words and gentle accents she details the particulars of her last interview with Keith. Ruth listens to her with bent head. So he had learned that he had wronged her ? The story of his bitter regret and repentance is as balm applied to a gaping wound. When Molly concludes she is mute. Molly puts her arms about her stooping shoulders

"He loved you," she says.

"Yes," the *timbre* of Ruth's voice is very sweet, "he loved me. I can bear my pain now. Oh, my dearest, my dearest ! if I could only have told you how I love you !" And then, when they are not looked for, Ruth's tears gush, and her reason is saved.

"Let me go to Dayrell," Ruth cries, a few hours later. "Take me home ! take me home !"

Molly is very willing. Rex says he will accompany them and return to Clitheroe. He has not abandoned hope. He wishes to be on the spot to superintend all that is to be done. He trusts that Keith will be restored to them alive, but, if he is not, his body must be found, if possible.

Ruth has not been outside Myrtle Cottage since the calamity of Keith's loss fell upon her, but as she watches Hulme packing trunks preparatory to their departure, an intense and irresistible yearning comes upon her to look once more upon the sea which has so cruelly bereaved her. Without a word to any one, she slips unseen out of the house, and hurries to the sea-shore. The sea is rippling calmly. Ruth's limbs grow rigid as she gazes at its placid surface. Is her beloved sleeping the sleep which is eternal somewhere in its depths ? A dry sob shakes her. Oh, Keith, will she ever look on your face again ? will she ever touch your hand ? Heaven send she may, even though your face be still and your hands cold—even though you be dead. Has he gone into the land of shadows hungering for her forgiveness ? If she could but have assured him that she had forgiven him long, long ago ! Cannot she waft her forgiveness to him ? If she could die ! Ah, what is that ? A strange voice is sounding in her ear. She blenches. What says it ? Death is easy ; one plunge, and it will all be ended—"all the dull deep pain and constant anguish of patience." She trembles ; the sea, so white-crested, lures her. Shall she—

"Ruth ?" It is *his* ghost. It cannot be Keith, he is dead ! One sharp cry rings out in the silence, and she is strained to Keith Brabazon's leaping heart.

"My darling!" he says, and his tone is human.

Joy. She is circled in his arm, his arm of flesh; he is as one risen from the dead, but she asks not whence he has come. She is well content to lie in his embrace, well content to feel his lips upon her lips. At last he, thirsty for the music of her voice, speaks.

"Ruth," he says, "they tell me you thought I was drowned."

How she quivers! Tighter is his clasp. She touches his face. Is she anxious to reassure herself that he is a man, and not a wraith? "How has it happened? Where have you been? Yes, we thought you were drowned," she falters.

"And I should have been, but for a most fortunate chance—nay, it was a providence, not a chance. I went out to bathe, as you know. I swam out very far; the morning and the sea were delicious. When I was a great way from the shore, cramp, awful cramp, gripped me. I must have sunk had not help been at hand. I cried out lustily, and my cry was heard, and help rendered me. A sailor belonging to a yacht jumped into the sea and swam to me, and I was taken on board. The owner of the yacht was making a trip to France, I was perforce obliged to go with him. I left him, however, at the first opportunity, and hurried home. I was afraid my absence would alarm you."

She smiles involuntarily. "It more than alarmed me," she says.

"Oh, Ruth!" he holds her from him and looks at her, and as he looks he remembers how they two parted—"Ruth!" he cries, "have you forgotten that I doubted you? It was to ask you to pardon that doubt that I came here. Will you pardon it?"

"Hush"—her fingers are pressed upon his mouth—"my dear, my dear, I have nought to pardon."

Is this true? Keith fears not. He attempts to show her the enormity of his suspicions, but she will not hear him. Her lover has been brought back to her from the very jaws of the grave; she is too happy to recollect past grievances. They walk slowly, she leaning on his arm, feeble with the very excess of emotion.

"We must go home," she says presently, "Molly will rejoice."

- "She is rejoicing. I have seen her. She sent me out to look for you. She said I could best break to you the news that I was saved. Oh, my darling, how wonderful it is that we are together!"

"Yes."

He cannot refrain from harping upon what has been. "I was mad," he says, "not

to put absolute trust in you. Ruth, Ruth, I have been punished for my unfaith. I have not known any happiness since I left you."

Has he not? She says shyly, "Did you not put me out of your remembrance when you put yourself out of my sight?"

"No, no. Ruth, I cannot expect you will believe me, but my love for you has increased and strengthened in spite of my endeavours to kill it." She does believe him, the belief is too sweet to be refused credence.

They are at Dayrell, and once again the year is clad with gladness and delight. It is August—just a twelvemonth since Keith and Ruth talked of their marriage-day. Heigho! vain was that talk. Will the talk they are talking now—it runs upon the same lines—be equally vain? No, no, no! Between Keith and Ruth never more will the faintest shadow of distrust dawn.

Keith has offered a full explanation to Ruth of that unhappy time, and his explanation has comforted her. After all, his doubt was not so unreasonable. Overhearing the words of farewell Cecil spoke to her husband, and mistaking Cecil's voice for hers, it was but natural he should deem her false, and spurn her.

"I should have discredited the evidence of my ears, I am confident," he declares, "if Olive Amyot had not told me Danton, as he was called, was a one-time lover of yours."

"What?" Ruth exclaims in amazement. "A one-time lover of mine? Keith, that he never was. He never uttered a word of love to me in his life. He loved Cecil too well for that. How could Olive assert such a falsehood?"

"Miss Danton was her authority."

"Ah, Laura had her reasons for wishing you and I to live our lives apart, and she is not a particularly culpable woman."

He nods; he is considering whether Olive told him this falsehood with *malice prepense*. Well, well, it will answer no purpose to stir muddy waters. He was most to blame. If he had not been mad with jealousy! He frowns darkly. Ruth whispers—

"Forget, Keith, forget."

\* \* \* \* \*

Keith is staying with Rex and Molly. Mrs. Amyot and Olive are in Italy. Olive at last has been persuaded to breathe the fateful "Yes," for which so many of her suitors have sighed. She is betrothed to a Mr. Arkwright, a man of position and

wealth. Ruth's wedding-day is fixed ; her wedding will be quiet—Cecil's death is too recent for it to be otherwise. Ruth is looking well ; there is a restful light in her eyes, a healthy tint upon her cheeks. She is very happy—

" Day is heaped on day, as flower on flower ;  
Night with night is mingled in starry round."

Keith is a supremely perfect sweetheart—

" Joyful are these twain.

With joy of all things fed—the breeze of morn,  
The freshness of the fresh'ning summer, the blue  
Of August skies, the hues of bud and bloom,  
The breath of flowers ; all things that breathe and bring

Joy to the world, to them love's raptures give."

Molly avers that Rex and she were never such lovers, but Ruth remembers certain days of yore, and she reminds Molly of them.

To-morrow Ruth will be Ruth Brabazon. Her heart is full of this thought as she walks with Keith, and he divines it.

" My dear," he says, " are you sad to-night because to-morrow you will bestow yourself on me ? "

" I am not sad—a little grave, perhaps, thinking of old memories, of old dreams. Keith, you fancy I shall make you a good wife ? "

He laughs a laugh of confidence. " Yes, my darling."

They are walking towards Dayrell Wood. Pallor whitens Ruth's face as they pass the Wood House. It is closed and empty. " I wish you had known Cecil," she says, with trembling lips, " you would have esteemed her. Keith, her love blighted her life."

He assents. Ruth muses. Richard Wilde is doing better abroad than she ever hoped he would. Cecil's death was a stunning blow to him, for, with all his faults and sins, he loved her sincerely. He has sworn he will never touch a card again ; if he keeps his oath he may prosper. Laura Wilde is living in London ; it is not likely Ruth and she will meet in the future.

Keith Brabazon studies Ruth's delicately expressive face, then he follows her example and falls into profound thought—thought from which he rouses himself abruptly.

" Ruth," he queries, " are you very attached to Dayrell Manor ? "

She flushes, and glances at him in surprise. " It is a beautiful place."

" But do you like it so well that it would pain you sorely to leave it ? "

" Oh, no ! Keith, I have never regarded it as my own. I do not think it ought to be mine. Mr. Dayrell should have left it to Molly and not to me."

" Right. Ruth, how would you like to give it back to Molly ? "

She clasps her hands, her cheeks are very rosy. " If I could ! " she murmurs.

" You can, an' it please you, you shall. You shall give it to her by deed of gift."

" But, Keith, if I do this you will have a poor wife."

" Nay, you will never be a poor wife ; and if you come to me without Dayrell Manor you will bring me as much worldly store as you would have brought me had I married you when you were Ruth Lister. Ruth, when our honeymoon—that is a charming word, is it not ?—is over, we will find a pleasant, pretty home : a home that shall have upon it no grim shadows of past sorrows. Oh, my love ! Heaven has been gracious to me verily ! What am I that you love me ? "

She is silent. His marvel is her marvel. What is she that he loves her ? He reads in her limpid eyes her unspoken thought, and he smiles.

" Sweetheart," he cries, " we are very foolish to cudgel our brains as to why we love each other. We do love each other, that knowledge should satisfy us."

" Yes."

\* \* \* \* \*

A day sweet with ambrosial odours is Ruth's wedding-day.

" YORSTON."

THE END.

#### BENEATH THE STARS.

SOFTLY twilight shades are falling,  
And no sound is on the breeze  
But the gentle wood-dove calling  
To his mate amid the trees.  
  
All is silent, and I wander  
Through the forest pathway dim,  
Neath the starlight do I ponder,  
Heeding not the shadows grim.  
  
Thus I raise my eyes to Heaven,  
Lighted up by many a star ;  
And my musing thoughts are given  
To the love who roams afar !

Will he dream of me, and love me  
Ever, as he loves me now ?  
Answer, fair, pale stars above me,  
Tell me how he loves me, how ?  
  
Are his thoughts for ever tender ?  
Is his true heart all my own ?  
Does he still the worship render  
That he said was mine alone ?  
  
See, the shades are growing lighter ;  
Do I make his happiness ?  
See—the stars are purer—brighter,  
As they softly answer, " Yes ! "

E. H. DAVIDSON.





